

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **How To Look Good Naked ‘On the couch’**

### **Psychoanalytic approaches to British makeover television and gender’**

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***How To Look Good Naked* ‘On the Couch’:  
Psychoanalytic approaches to British makeover  
television and gender**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of PhD**

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## ABSTRACT

This project formulates an original psycho-cultural approach by studying the cultural and therapeutic value of Gok Wan's makeover series *How To Look Good Naked*. Through an in-depth application of Donald Woods Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis to the textual narratives of the makeover show, and by developing a viewing method that derives from psychoanalytic training on observation, this thesis offers an account of the affective impact of Gok Wan's popular makeover phenomenon. This thesis addresses key themes and elements that signal the evolution of British makeover television and identifies how Gok Wan's format and strategies chime with what has widely been hailed as a particularly 'therapeutic' moment in popular culture. The emblematic features of Gok Wan's rendition of the makeover format highlights its potential positive outcomes by examining the articulation of current embodied feminine subjective experiences, in order to interrogate the complex relationship between postfeminism and therapeutic discourse. This thesis recognises that the therapeutic opportunity of Gok Wan's method lies in the transformational process by creating emotionally constructive spaces where the articulation of experiences leads to inner self-discovery. Playful mechanisms of creativity are central to Gok Wan's empathetic approach to working with participants to enable transformation, reflecting a number of key themes in object relations psychoanalysis and its understanding of self-experience. The opportunities afforded to participants for self-interpretation create a useful platform to reflect on Gok Wan's role, who has been candid about the parallels between his own emotional experience and that of his participants. Psychoanalytic models of

transference and countertransference indicate how this dynamic challenges dominant notions of the makeover expert as omnipotent. This project demonstrates the value of object relations psychoanalysis for critical interventions in the field of media, cultural and feminist studies in order to provide a deeper understanding of the affective impact of makeover television in shaping notions of subjective experience.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Makeover culture is a prevalent phenomenon of contemporary media. The rise of makeover television, and more specifically the personal makeover shows – where the self is a central concern – emerges in a cultural period where the popular is in an ongoing quest of searching for personal and emotional meanings as a pathway to improve and/or transform oneself.

The makeover is a successful story of lifestyle television. The self-improvement format of this reality-based programming is becoming more commonplace due to its widespread production in featuring ordinary people negotiating their everyday concerns followed by a transformation process in the hands of the expert. The textual and narrative frames of the makeover have been perceived as lacking cultural value; their significance, however, can be measured in terms of the volume of critical academic engagement with the genre.

Makeover culture is valuable for its subjects and by extension the viewers. This research project sets out to explore the cultural significance of makeover television in constructing valuable opportunities for its female participants (and viewers as an extension of them) to negotiate current feminine concerns in relation to the body and explore hidden aspects of inner subjective experiences in an emotionally telling way. It is important then to consider the significance of the genre and to do so in a way that pays proper attention to the discourses of feeling and emotional experience that traverse it. Therefore, it seems important to investigate the therapeutic claims

made for the genre and to consider its role in the context of a cultural turn that has been hailed as ‘therapeutic’.

This project begins by considering controversial discussions on the impact of makeover television. Since its arrival, in early 2000, the television makeover show has generated a plethora of academic debate and critique that focus on the challenges of understanding the (dis)pleasures of makeover culture. Key points of critical engagement focus on the ideological context of the genre as a neoliberal project as well as its implications for issues around identity, the body, gender politics, femininity, class, and capitalism (Akass and McCabe, 2007; Frith, Raisborough & Klein, 2010, 2014; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert, 2007; Heller, 2007; Kolehmainen, 2012; Lewis, 2007, 2009; McRobbie, 2004; Morris, 2007; Palmer, 2004; Redden, 2008; Rodrigues, 2012; Sender, 2012; Weber, 2009; Ouellette & Hay, 2008a, 2008b). Much of this work emphasises a critical, and often negative, perspective on the genre as a whole. However, it is my view that the makeover genre also merits investigation in terms of its potential advantages. This research project aims to investigate to what extent popular makeover formats can create positive opportunities for their participants, and by extension the viewers, to explore aspects of inner self-experience in an emotionally telling way that can be regarded as therapeutic.

Gok Wan’s widely praised makeover format *How To Look Good Naked* (hereafter *HTLGN*) (Channel 4, 2006-2010) provides a useful case study for such a project since its format focuses on the importance of emotions and self-reflection as means of transforming the self. Gok Wan’s makeover approach is focused on improving



the way in which ordinary women feel about themselves by overcoming their body insecurities and exploring their self-identity. To achieve this, Gok Wan sets out a process in which he guides his female subjects through a set of psychological practices and self-esteem building exercises with the intention of helping them to make sense of their body insecurities and feelings of discontent around their body-image. Looking at the processes and strategies at work in *HTLGN*, together with the on-screen relationship that is formed between the expert and the female participants, this thesis explores Gok Wan's cultural impact within the makeover framework of *HTLGN* and analyses the format's therapeutic potential to provide meaningful spaces that facilitate the emotional exploration of the self.

My project arises from and is influenced by the 'Media and the Inner World' research network, as it proposes a psycho-cultural reading to recognise the affective impact of makeover television. The 'Media and the Inner World' (MiW) research network was established in 2009 and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK. The 'MiW' project and its directors Caroline Bainbridge and Candida Yates developed a psycho-cultural method to foreground the pertinence of object relations psychoanalysis 'to analyse current media trends and popular cultural texts' (<http://www.miwnet.org/Website/about/>) in order to explore 'the role of emotion [and therapy] in contemporary popular culture' (Bainbridge & Yates, 2011: i). For the 'MiW' directors:

A psycho-cultural approach takes as its starting point the idea that academic studies of popular culture can benefit from the development of object relations psychoanalysis ... because of the increasingly important role of the emotionalised media in shaping a sense of identity, culture and therapeutic inflections of both. (Bainbridge and Yates, 2011: ii)

Following this model, and drawing on the work of Donald Woods Winnicott, this thesis formulates an in-depth psycho-cultural reading of the textual and narrative aspects of the *HTLGN* makeover process and strategies employed by the makeover expert in order to examine the emotional and therapeutic impact of the show for its female participants. It also explores the position of the expert within its culturally and emotionally rich processes.

My work makes extensive use of Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis to scrutinise the *HTLGN* 'method' and to explore the format's therapeutic opportunities, asking what is emotionally at stake for Gok Wan, his female participants and the viewers in the makeover setting. As discussed in the next section, it is important to underline that my research has identified a specific approach at work in *HTLGN* that I regard as a 'method', and this substantially distinguishes Gok Wan's procedural arrangements from those in competitor makeover shows.

To date, there has not been an extensive and detailed psycho-cultural reading of the textual and narrative aspects of a makeover frame that focuses on scrutinising psychoanalytic evidence of how *HTLGN* works to produce therapeutic opportunities. Thus, in attempting to provide such an analysis, this thesis makes a significant contribution to both the study of makeover television and psychoanalytic studies of popular culture. Thinking psycho-culturally about makeover television is a means of exploring how the format shapes subjective experiences, how we make sense of ourselves in a culturally rich environment, and

how we emotionally relate to others to enrich a sense of self. Winnicott's ideas focus on the nature of subjectivity and cultural experience and place emphasis on the importance of the wider environment in the construction of the emotional and rational self. Winnicott's (1971) work treats our 'cultural experience' as something positive and constructive that enriches the notion of self and contributes to an emotional understanding of our inner and outer subjective experiences of our self with others and in society. Thus, Winnicott's ideas provide a useful framework for the study of the cultural value of makeover television. The prominence and cultural relevance of Winnicott's work in studying the makeover text in such an extensive manner will be highlighted throughout the discussion of this research project.

### **Getting *Naked* with Gok Wan**

Ko-Hen Wan, better known as Gok Wan, is an exuberant, enthusiastic, caring, highly empathetic and well-recognised figure in British makeover culture. Gok Wan's name has been associated in popular media with terms like 'body confidence', 'self-esteem' and 'feel good'. Initially working as a fashion stylist in celebrity magazines, Gok Wan is now best known for the launch of his innovative makeover series *How To Look Good Naked*.

Originally airing in the UK on Channel 4, *HTLGN* ran for five consecutive series and concluded in 2010. Described on its website as 'the inspirational fashion series that shows women how to look fantastic with their clothes on or off no matter what their body shape – and all without a surgeon's scalpel in sight' (Channel 4, 2011), Gok Wan's innovative approach to women's makeover culture was evident from

the series' launch. Gok Wan introduced his programme by stating: 'Do you avoid getting naked in front of the mirror? Do you undress in the dark? ... Well do not despair ... because I am here ...' (*HTLGN*: Series 1, Episode 1).

In his original *HTLGN* prologue, Gok Wan alerts us from the outset that he recognises that the emotional relationship that ordinary women have to their 'naked' body-image is often described as troubled, unhappy and suffused with emotional despair. Instead of physically altering the female corpus, Gok Wan guides contemporary British women from the general public on how to embrace their natural figures, face their fears and 'naked' body-insecurities and learn to feel good no matter what their shape and/or size. And in doing so, the makeover show attempts to shed light on these emotionally troubled experiences in relation to the body to reveal how these are manifested through the body.

Gok Wan's makeover formula is distinctly different from other shows such as *Extreme Makeover* (ABC, 2002-2007) and *10 Years Younger* (Channel 4, 2004-) where surgical and cosmetic enhancements are performed on the body to transform the self. The *HTLGN* makeover approach does not require its participants to undergo extreme dieting or fitness regimes as in *The Biggest Loser* (Living TV, 2005-2006; ITV, 2009-2012), *Celebrity Fit Club* (ITV, 2002-2006) or *You Are What You Eat* (Channel 4, 2004-2006). It is important to signal that Gok Wan's makeover discourse works both within and against the neoliberal imperative, raising important questions about the impact of these on everyday women's notions of selfhood and I will go on to explore the nuances of this in more depth in Chapter 3.

*HTLGN* also situates itself somewhat differently from other non-surgical makeover shows, such as *What Not To Wear* (BBC2, 2001-2003; BBC1, 2004-2007). Here, hosts Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine teach women in an authoritative tone, and through the use of verbal insults, how to dress in ways that improve their looks and boost their confidence. Trinny and Susannah's intimidating stance, as Angela McRobbie (2009) argues, has often induced feelings of embarrassment and humiliation in their makeover participants. Gok Wan's non-threatening attitude has popularly differentiated him from his makeover opponents, and this has allowed him to be culturally recognised as someone who appears to care. His 'performative engagement' with his participants mobilises the therapeutic discourse that prevails in contemporary culture – an extended discussion of this will follow in Chapter 5.

Gok Wan's empathetic, caring and non-intimidating approach to women's makeover culture was reviewed and somewhat celebrated by major UK newspapers. Articles in *The Guardian* newspaper included statements such as: 'In Gok we trust' (Cooke, 2007); 'Trinny & Susannah are dead – long live Gok Wan!' (Wignall, 2008); 'Thank Gok for knowing what's right' (Rice, 2011); Gok Wan is 'the saviour of modern womanhood ... the messiah' (Freeman, 2008). These are just a few examples of the critical praise that Gok Wan received in response to the affective impact of his makeover format, which raises the question of why and how this makeover show has been received and acclaimed more broadly.

Even though Gok Wan's show and approach was positively received by most popular media reports, the *The Daily Mail* published an online article negatively

appraising Gok Wan's attitude off set. This was entitled: 'How to feel BAD naked: A model reveals how fashion guru Gok Wan can be "vile" behind the scenes' (Courtenay-Smith, 2008). This article challenged the position of his public media persona as the caring and female friendly figure of British makeover culture. However, in order to develop a psycho-cultural perspective, my project focuses on Gok Wan's on-screen and public media persona by examining his performative engagement with his participants in order to make a case for his cultural significance and prominent position in the contemporary media landscape.

Gok Wan's makeover project had popular appeal. Audience figures reveal that 3.52 million viewers (14.3%) tuned in to the first episode in order to 'get naked' with Gok Wan, Channel 4's highest ever viewing figures at that point (Rogers, 2007). Drawing on Broadcasters' Audience Research Board data, Sara Rodrigues (2012:43) indicates that the *HTLGN* series were 'consistently ranked among the top thirty programs in each week of the series'. She notes that since the beginning of the *HTLGN* series and for each week the 'average viewership was 2.54 million viewers per week' and in 2010 which marked the final season of Gok Wan's makeover series, 'the average viewership was 1.65 million viewers per week (ibid).

The format of *HTLGN* also enjoyed great success, with numerous international versions distributed in countries such as Canada, Italy, Belgium, France, Israel, the Czech Republic and Sweden. The debut of the US version was the most-watched programme on the Lifestyle Television network (Lifetime Television, 2008; Toffoletti, 2014). Evidently, what is culturally implied here is an increased appetite for shows that offer its viewers moments of self-reflexivity allowing them to

connect with their feelings and experience a form of emotional relief and/or search for a deeper meaning and understanding of their inner subjective experience.

As the original creator of the *HTLGN* approach, Gok Wan has vividly revolutionised the self-improvement genre by developing a playful, caring and female friendly makeover platform that values the articulation of emotional experiences in relation to the body, encourages self-expression and facilitates the exploration of the inner layer of subjectivity through the psychological exercises and self-reflective practices that he sets out for his subjects.

To emotionally facilitate such a process, Gok Wan adopts strategies and characteristics stereotypically associated with the approach of a therapist. More importantly, in the *HTLGN* situation, Gok Wan makes use of popular makeover props in an emotionally telling way, that activate the mechanism of self-reflection in the setting and contribute to the emotional development of the participants' makeover journey. It is Gok Wan's employment of 'psychological' techniques and the use of 'props' in the makeover cultural frame that merits a psychoanalytic reading and cultural investigation.

My research recognises that the appearance of the *HTLGN* format signals a profound shift in the makeover frame towards the discourse of the therapeutic, and this is due to the timeliness of its appearance in the media realm. Gok Wan's makeover discourse chimes with what has widely been hailed as a particularly 'therapeutic' moment in popular culture (Richards, 2004; Richards and Brown, 2011, 2002; Bainbridge and Yates, 2012, 2014; Yates, 2013). The framework it

uses is rich in psychoanalytic nuances as discussed in Chapter 2, and it plays an integral part in examining the opportunity that Gok Wan activates for his subjects within the setting of the show. This allows his female subjects to explore hidden aspects of their inner self-experience and identity in a meaningful way. It is useful then to explore Gok Wan's makeover show through a psychoanalytic lens as it will help to reveal aspects of cultural and social experiences that usually remain hidden, unspoken and emotionally unexplored.

My thesis, then, makes an original contribution to the study of makeover discourse as it highlights a new way of understanding the complex relationship between gender, television, neoliberalism and postfeminism – themes which inform its structure. In this way, the thesis examines the genre's cultural value and its shaping of current feminine emotional and subjective experiences in relation to the body. It also makes an original contribution to feminist criticism through its object relations psychoanalytic intervention as it reveals the facilitating space and cultural opportunities that can be offered within a postfeminist discourse. Such a methodological intervention holds gender political importance as it re-visits the potential of psychoanalysis for feminist cultural criticism (Mitchell, 1974; Mulvey, 1975) and its significance as a tool to excavate and thus bring to the surface questions of gender politics that often remain unspoken, hidden and/or uncharted beneath layers of ideological debates. The scope of this work to extend into feminist criticism will be followed up at the post-doctoral stage of my research.



## **Aims and objectives**

The aims and objectives of this research project are to demonstrate the usefulness of applying Winnicott's psychoanalysis to the study of makeover television and to show how his work enables us to think psycho-culturally about the affective impact of the self-improvement format in shaping embodied subjective experiences. A central aim is to psychoanalytically scrutinise how/whether the *HTLGN* frame provides its makeover participants with a 'therapeutic' opportunity through the kind of 'talk' and the environment that Gok Wan facilitates within the setting. In addition, the research aims to consider how/whether Gok Wan's *Naked* makeover framework provides a postfeminist opportunity for its female participants to overcome their body-issues. It explores the way in which the playful and creative elements of *HTLGN* constitute a form of 'cultural experience' and to examine the role of Gok Wan in facilitating the process. It also offers a psychoanalytic account of the on-screen relationship formed between Gok Wan and his female subjects by exploring the emotional investments and unconscious processes that are at play in the *HTLGN* setting. Finally, it seeks to signal an important evolution in the makeover format by reflecting on the expert's engagement in the makeover frame. It does this by evaluating Gok Wan's cultural significance and position beyond the *HTLGN* setting, by examining his persona in the varied televisual and popular cultural texts with which he has subsequently been associated. The thesis addresses these research aims by providing a close and in-depth reading of the textual format and narrative aspects of *HTLGN* and it also explores the persona of Gok Wan as a cultural construct, examining the function of his role as a caring and highly empathetic figure of British makeover culture.

I have chosen several case studies from the programme, which span the whole run of the series. As mentioned previously, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how Winnicott's object relations psychoanalytic ideas on 'Transitional objects and Transitional phenomena' (1953); 'The Holding [or facilitating] environment' and 'parent-infant relationship' (1960b); 'The Use of an Object', 'Playing', 'Creativity and its origins' and 'Mirror-role of the mother' (1971); as well as Winnicott's most renowned paper 'The Location of Cultural Experience' (1971) are useful and highly relevant methodological tools that I will psycho-culturally employ for the study of the makeover format.

### ***How To Look Good Naked, Psychoanalysis and the 'Inner World'***

At first glance, applications of psychoanalysis to the study of media texts have been largely obedient to the writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan (Kaplan, 1990; Wright, 1998). However, this has generally been in the study of film and cinema and comparatively little attention has been paid to its usefulness in the study of television. Some aspects of 'cine-psychoanalysis' can provide a useful opening to the study of television, as in the work of Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992). She explores 'psychoanalysis as a cultural theory', although her references are exclusively to the work of Freud and Lacan. However, in more recent times, there has been a turn towards the relevance of Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis in the study of cinema, and some of this is also useful for the study of television (Bainbridge, 2014; Bainbridge & Yates, 2011; 2012; 2014; Clarke, 1994; Diamond, 2014; Konigsberg, 1996; Kuhn, 2013; Lebeau, 2009).

Recently, media and cultural academic critics have argued for the relevance of object relations psychoanalysis in relation to television specifically (Bainbridge, 2013a; Bainbridge, Ward and Yates, 2013; Hills, 2014; Whitehouse-Hart, 2014; Yates, 2013). However, it is the work of Roger Silverstone (1994) that my thesis recognises as highly relevant for the application of Winnicott's work to the study of makeover television. Silverstone's work takes up a psychoanalytic focus on media in general and television in particular. Influenced by Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis, Silverstone (1994) applies his concept of the 'transitional object' to explore the role and impact of television in ordering our everyday life. Although Winnicott (1953) discusses the 'transitional object' as being a baby's blanket or a doll, Silverstone argues that television can similarly be considered a transitional object, because it is able to create the security and comfort needed for independence, and contributes to the production of our identity formation.

Silverstone's critical view of television as a 'transitional object' reveals television's 'emotional [and psychological] significance' (Silverstone, 1994:3) in enabling its viewers to deal with the uncertainties of everyday life by offering up opportunities where aspects of identity and the self can be challenged, explored and managed in a creative way. Television offers playful and creative experiences that contribute to the formation of our subjective experience of the self and can be used socially and symbolically to facilitate a potentially therapeutic space of 'working through'. I will seek to build on this aspect of Silverstone's work in my study of makeover television. As discussed above, *HTLGN* can be read as a space of 'cultural experience', and therefore can be seen to provide potential therapeutic space for its participants and viewers. The programme opens up this space through its use of

self-reflecting processes and mechanisms that enable participants (and by extension the viewers) to challenge, discover, interpret and/or symbolically renew their sense of self and identity. This signals the 'emotional significance' (Silverstone, 1994:3) and cultural importance of television in relaying such reflective engagements and narratives to the viewer with the opportunities to open meaningful cultural spaces for the negotiation of their inner subjectivity. Using Silverstone's work as a starting point, this research project extends the analysis by applying Winnicott's key theoretical concepts to an in-depth study of the textual and formal aspects of the programme under scrutiny here. My work innovates in this respect as it demonstrates the usefulness of Winnicott's theory in a more sustained way. My research explores the emotional and psychological investment involved in programmes such as *HTLGN*, and the ways in which popular media texts can enrich our notion of inner self through the reflective opportunities they provide. These opportunities shape aspects of our internal world and, as a result, our sense of identity. Even though the pertinence of Silverstone's work on television is clear, he does not bring any in-depth textual analysis to his application.

As discussed above, my research also builds on the work and impact of the 'MiW' project, highlighting the emotional impact of contemporary media in shaping our subjective experiences and in contributing to the formation of identity (Bainbridge, Radstone, Rustin & Yates, 2007; Bainbridge, 2011; Richards and Brown, 2011; Yates, 2011; Breton, 2011; Leader, 2011; Bainbridge & Yates, 2011; 2012; 2014; Balik, 2014; MacRury & Rustin, 2014; Richards, forthcoming). The collection of work edited by Bainbridge, Ward and Yates (2013) has been of a great importance for the development of this thesis as it contributes to a meaningful understanding

of the emotional impact and significance of television by developing a critical lens grounded in object relations approaches.

However, this project has also been developed in the context of critical work in the field of television studies. In recent years, *HTLGN* has triggered media, cultural and feminist debates by interdisciplinary scholars who have produced work on the implications of popular makeover discourse (Frith, Raisborough and Klein, 2010; 2014; Kadir and Tidy, 2013; McLoughlin, 2013; Powell, 2013; Rodrigues, 2012; Toffoletti, 2014; Tsaousi, 2015).

Even though the format has been recognised for its ‘good intentions’ (Rodrigues, 2012:50), recent feminist work argues that its postfeminist inflection is sustained by neoliberal practices of self-governmentality, emotional capitalism and the labour of self-confidence. Rodrigues argues that Gok Wan’s ‘naked’ format ‘deemphasizes the sartorial makeover’ and aims instead to ‘engender intangible, long-term, internal change’ (48). This internal transformational change, as Tsaousi (2015) argues, is achieved through a ‘six step’ process which allows Gok Wan to ‘re-construct’ the participant’s feminine identity. The feminist critique accurately problematises the naked ‘magazine-like’ postfeminist depiction of the female body to be ‘gazed upon’ and ‘de-constructed’. However, my thesis aims to prioritise the role of emotions in the makeover frame and engages with the postfeminist complexities and messiness of the *HTLGN* discourse through the psychoanalytic lens of object relations. My work investigates not only the format’s ‘good intention’ but also the space it produces to facilitate a postfeminist opportunity with therapeutic potential where current feminine subjective troubled experience in

relation to the body finds cultural expression but also becomes emotionally understood. Moreover, and instead of decoding *HTLGN* into a ‘six step lesson plan’, my object relations psychoanalytic reading and in depth textual analysis of Gok Wan’s method aims to scrutinise the format’s procedural arrangement and makeover process in order to signal the way in which the makeover space opens up an opportunity for a ‘cultural experience’. This opportunity will be explored by analysing the way in which Gok Wan’s stylist practices activate playful mechanisms of creativity which allow his participants to explore hidden or unexplored elements of their inner feminine subjective experiences in relation to the body in order to attain emotional awareness and thus enrich aspects of self-identity.

Gok Wan’s female friendly ‘gaze’ and his almost cartoonish media persona has attracted also academic interest and discussion. Work offered by Kadir & Tidy (2013:181) indicate that Gok Wan’s gaze and makeover persona remains faithful to the postfeminist tropes of the gay best friend ‘with a caring feminine side’. Frith, Raisborough & Klein have argued that Gok Wan’s ‘suspended sexuality’ (2010: 480, italics in the original) allows the show to conjure up the feminine and a safe space within the makeover setting, thus allowing Gok Wan ‘to maintain his position as the expert facilitator’ (481). These works provide a useful entry point for exploring Gok Wan’s ‘performative engagement’ of care and empathy with his female participants; however, my thesis aims to psycho-culturally scrutinise further his empathetic stance and whether this contributes to an evolution of the makeover format. Moreover, Gok Wan’s ‘gaze’ will be further explored from Winnicott’s perspective that accentuates the role of the ‘good enough’ mother’s gaze and

mirroring of experience that she makes available to her infant in order to enrich and strengthen the infant's sense of self, thus facilitating its emotional development and self-identity.

To date, much of the work on Gok Wan does not take into account the potential value of a psychoanalytic approach, as I discuss in Chapter 4. However, in work allied with 'MiW', Whitehouse-Hart (2014) has contributed an important psycho-cultural discussion of the impact of the encounter with mirrors in *HTLGN*, highlighting its role in inducing paranoid anxiety and feelings of wounded narcissism in both the makeover participants and its viewers and drawing on the theoretical ideas of Winnicott and Melanie Klein. This work focuses on one element of the makeover process – the use of mirrors.

By contrast, this thesis scrutinises Gok Wan's makeover approach as a whole, and reads it through Winnicott's ideas in order to explore the emotional investments and unconscious processes at work in the makeover setting, where emotions and emotional experience take centre stage. This is then an original attempt to investigate *HTLGN*'s positive and therapeutic potential as mobilised by Gok Wan through his makeover 'method' and performative engagement with his subjects. It signals the cultural *value* of makeover discourse, showing how hidden and often culturally uncharted aspects of self-experience can be reflected, explored and therefore managed in a meaningful and constructive way.

In order to discuss the themes identified so far, the thesis is broken down into six chapters. Chapter 1 offers a conceptualisation of the reality makeover show, and

reviews the production of the self-improvement format within its media, political and socio-economic contexts. This chapter interrogates the elements, techniques and practices that the makeover show borrows – as a sub-genre of Reality TV – from other popular entertainment genres such as soap opera, tabloid journalism and documentary television, and asks how these contribute to its popularity and success. Additionally, it considers the proliferation of the lifestyle makeover show and situates its emergence within a broader cultural turn towards neoliberalism, the ‘ordinari-ization’ of British media (Brunsdon et al., 2001) and a preoccupation with watching ordinary people negotiating their ‘real-life’ (Bonner, 2003; Hill, 2005) and everyday concerns. I draw on links between lifestyle self-improvement programmes and American ‘talk shows’ and the depiction of a ‘woman’s space’, a space which values female voices, facilitates expression and negotiates emotional conflicts. The notion of ‘talk’ and the negotiation of emotional conflicts in the public domain of the ‘talk show’ signal the cultural growth of a “TV-talk-as-therapy-genre” (Landeman, 1995; Masciarotte, 1991; Shattuc, 1997; Squire, 1994) through the development towards the first therapeutically inclined show that is *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Syndication, 1986-2011). This discussion will set the frame for Chapter 2 to explore and foreground the role of the ‘couch’ in the makeover frame.

In order to make the work more readable and to offer a subsequent discussion of the psycho-cultural approach taken in this thesis, a ‘chapter interlude’ is offered after Chapter 1. Here, the thesis addresses the methodological aspects and theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis of the research. In this chapter interlude, I provide a detailed account of the object relations psychoanalytic



theories and ideas that are used in the chapter that follow, where my focus is on case studies that provide an opportunity to *analyse HTLGN*. The interlude also provides reflective commentary on the selection process used to identify case study material from the programme. It also examines my role and position as an 'observer' who deploys psychoanalytic thinking to formulate an analysis of the case study material. This is a method specific to psychoanalytic training and psychoanalytic studies and thinkers such as Michael Rustin (1989; 2006; 2009; 2012) have argued that such an approach is important to social science research.

Following the 'chapter interlude', Chapter 2 explores the critical debates on therapy culture/therapeutic culture. The emergence of reality television programmes parallels the rise of therapy culture in Britain. Drawing on polarised debates about the value or otherwise of therapy culture, I consider the fascination in wider society with emotions, experience and therapy practices that promise happiness and emotional well-being. I argue that reality makeover programmes constitute a site where the characteristics and significance of therapeutic discourse are crystallised. This chapter positions the production of the *HTLGN* as a timely intervention, coinciding with a positive view of therapy culture. These debates are substantial, as they frame the analysis of the Gok Wan phenomenon and the view of his makeover approach as a significant therapeutic opportunity.

Chapter 3 offers a postfeminist perspective on the *HTLGN* experience. It considers the programme's capacity to produce a space where current feminine experience in relation to body-image frustrations can be emotionally expressed and safely voiced. This chapter engages with postfeminist debates in order to critically examine the

affective impact of popular (print) media in promoting unrealistic beauty ideals and body-image perfections. I consider how these become culturally internalised by ordinary women and develop into frustration towards what they perceive as their own body fallibilities. Drawing on object relations theories, I examine how definitions of what constitutes a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ body are culturally internalised by ordinary women and how they are emotionally manifested or experienced. The *HTLGN* case studies introduced in this chapter will provide evidence of these emotional processes at play. Drawing on a variety of case studies, I argue that the *HTLGN* frame generates a positive opportunity where current and often unspoken feminine subjective experiences in relation to the body can be voiced and culturally recognised.

Chapter 4 continues the case study analysis. I explore the ‘cultural value’ and the therapeutic opportunity of the *HTLGN* setting through an in-depth application of Winnicott’s theory to the textual framework of the makeover form. I examine the procedural sequence of two distinctive makeover cases that signal the format’s psychoanalytic significance and examine the position and function of Gok Wan in emotionally appropriating the setting to facilitate the subjects’ emotional transformation.

Chapter 5 psychoanalytically explores Gok Wan’s position as a non-threatening and non-intimidating figure of makeover television. I identify the key characteristics that contribute to the expert’s ‘caring’ approach towards his subjects’ body-insecurities and, using psychoanalytic approaches, I discuss Gok Wan’s empathetic stance in an effort to understand the significance of his role as

the ‘one who cares’. Drawing on biographical and media interview narratives of Gok Wan’s personal experience of body-related troubles, I use psychoanalysis to explore what is emotionally at stake for the makeover expert in order to understand the themes that recur in the narrative mobilised by Gok Wan around his persona, exploring how this is echoed in the show formats he has popularised. Such understanding can then be used to test the emotional temperature of the popular cultural moment in which *HTLGN* is firmly placed.

Chapter 6 addresses the expansion of the Gok Wan phenomenon and the cultural impact of his makeover approach almost ten years on. In order to psychoanalytically explain its emotional value in the contemporary media landscape, I critically investigate Gok Wan’s later media projects and psychoanalytically expand on the expert’s participation as a spokesman in a British advertisement campaign that promotes ‘healthy’ eating to women. In this final chapter, I psychoanalytically address the key concepts and the recurring themes seen in *HTLGN* and their repetition within selected advertisements. I suggest that these validate the cultural significance of Gok Wan’s therapeutic method, thereby helping to embed the emotional potential of such cultural experience more extensively.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Towards a psycho-cultural approach: contextualising the *How To Look Good Naked* makeover format**

Makeover television is a sub-genre of Reality TV. Makeover programmes, which involve the transformation of bodies, attitudes, places and things, have been a central element of western television schedules since the mid-1990s. Indeed, as Rachel Moseley (2000) describes, the late 1990s saw a ‘makeover takeover’ of British television that, in part, referenced ‘the “things can only get better” ethos of the New Labour government’ elected in 1997 (2000:300). As Moseley goes on to argue, ‘[m]akeover television certainly suggests some possibility of a change for the better – of home, of garden, or lifestyle generally and even of self’. While early versions of the genre primarily concerned the makeover of home and gardens such as *Changing Rooms* (BBC1, 1996-2004) and *Ground Force* (BBC1, 1997-2005), from the early 2000s these programmes extended from making over lifestyles to focusing on improving the self.

From surgical cosmetic interventions and extreme body regimes to fashion/style advice, the makeover or, as Dana Heller has called it (2007:2), ‘the popular idiom of reinvention’, is centrally premised around the possibility of transformation and the renewal of ordinary people into happier and more improved versions of themselves. Programmes such as *Extreme Makeover* use invasive techniques such as plastic surgery, diet, exercise and improved grooming as the best means of self-transformation. In a similar cosmetic fashion, *10 Years Younger* also concentrates

on changing the self for the better by extensive modifying of the body, whereas *What Not To Wear* offers wardrobe advice as the fastest way to a ‘new you’. However, it is Channel4’s *HTLGN* production that revolutionised the terrain of the self-improvement format, where the makeover expert Gok Wan introduced psychological practices and self-esteem building exercises as a means of improving the self and transforming ordinary women’s body-hatred into body-love and body-acceptance.

Central to Gok Wan’s method is the way in which the expert makes use of popular makeover props in order to alter his participants’ psychological mechanisms of self-reflection. This is an essential process that contributes to the emotional transformation of their negative body image perception. My thesis aims to investigate the cultural value and potential therapeutic opportunity that Gok Wan provides for his female subjects in his makeover show, which can be seen as an attempt to explore aspects of their identity and the self, and negotiate their emotional subjective experiences in relation to the body. My thesis argues that it is the concept of self-reflection, along with the availability of a supportive makeover space facilitated by the makeover expert himself, that allows current and often unspoken feminine concerns in relation to the body to be voiced, reflected upon and emotionally understood.

This study is an interdisciplinary one, as it combines approaches from media and cultural studies with theoretical ideas from the discipline of psychoanalysis in order to uncover the cultural and therapeutic value of the makeover format. Before

mapping out the psycho-cultural frame of this study, it is important to explain and conceptualise the makeover format as a media, cultural and political concept.

In its broad, generalised form, the makeover can be seen as a source of advice and information, a popular platform on which to witness the lives of ordinary people negotiating their everyday concerns. The position and role of the expert is one of the definitive characteristics of the makeover discourse. Like Reality TV, the makeover is a result of socio-political and economic circumstances and is produced out of lifestyle programming. The popularity and rise of lifestyle programming in Britain is a response to television's demotic turn and the fascination with the mundane, the 'real life' events of ordinary people.

Locating its initial footprints in woman's magazines (Mosley, 2000:303) and daytime television, reality makeover programming borrows extensively from older television genres such as documentaries that focus on members of the public by using fly-on-the-wall observational techniques as well as successful popular entertainment programmes such as soap operas and talk shows that focus on the emotional dilemmas and inner conflicts of ordinary people. Many of these shows frame discourses that predominantly negotiate female concerns. The aesthetics of melodrama in US soaps and the confessional dimension of 'talk' in talk shows are combined to create the makeover formats. This chapter will now begin by offering up definitions and explaining the links that *HTLGN* shares with Reality TV and lifestyle media as well as with popular entertainment formats.

Reality TV is a ‘catch-all category’ (Hill, 2005:2) as it draws from existing successful genres and formats to create a hybrid programme (Biressi & Nunn, 2005; Dovey, 2001; Hill, 2005). Reality TV has its roots in tabloid journalism and popular entertainment, but it owes its greatest popularity to documentary television. As Annette Hill (2005:15) explains, ‘[t]he genealogy of popular factual television is convoluted, as the type of hybrid programming we have come to associate with reality TV is difficult to categorise, and has developed within historically and culturally specific media environments’. Nevertheless, as Brunsdon et al. (2001) note, it is the hybridisation of successful genres that gives Reality TV such a strong market value.

Since my work proposes a psycho-cultural study in order to examine the role of emotions in makeover television, it is important to consider the various features, aesthetics and styles that are in operation and accentuate the *HTLGN*’s devotion to ordinary female experiences and concerns, shared emotions and reflective narratives. All these themes are of key significance in addressing the overall development of my project, which aims to culturally examine *HTLGN*’s ‘therapeutic’ opportunity for its female participants and viewers as an extension of their selves.

### **The contributors of the makeover format**

Starting with popular entertainment, I begin this section by interrogating the links that the makeover format shares with the genre of soap opera. Soap operas are fictional programmes that do not technically fit within the category of popular

entertainment, as this is normally used to describe non-fictional programming. Nevertheless, they have been influential in the development of the reality programming.

Makeover television sits squarely within what Lauren Berlant (2008:x) calls ‘woman’s culture’, in which women experience themselves ‘as part of an affective community’ (Sender, 2012:29). Makeover shows are concerned with ‘managing femininity’ including the pleasures and ambivalences that come with this (Berlant, 2008:5). The makeover format draws on the themes and melodramatic aesthetics of soap opera that are attentive to intimacy, value emotional expression and offer narrative frameworks within audiences, especially women audiences, to interpret and make sense of their experience.

Aimed at the typical housewife who listened to the radio while she did her housework, the term ‘soap opera’ denotes the extraordinarily popular genre of serialised domestic radio dramas<sup>1</sup>. The core feature of soap opera is its ability to package ‘the experience of fiction over an extended period of time, in segments’ (McCarthy, 2001:47). In defining the main characteristics of soap operas, Joanne

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Allen (1985:8) informs us that the term ‘soap’ derives from the sponsorship of these programmes by manufacturers of household cleaning products while ‘opera’ suggests ‘an ironic incongruity between the domestic narrative concerns of the daytime serial and the most elevated of dramatic forms’ (Ahmed, 2012:1). The soap opera originated on radio in the United States in the early 1930s. In the 1940s, there were 64 soap operas broadcast weekly in the US (Cantor & Pingree, 1983) and they were usually 15 minutes long. In the 1950s, the popularised genre evolved into television production and by 1975, the soap opera was no longer on radio but was the staple of American daytime television programming and by then had adopted an hour-long format. In 1978, *Dallas* (CBS, 1978–1991) ushered in the era of the prime-time soap opera. More prime-time soap operas were introduced over the next few years, including *Knots Landing* (CBS, 1979–1993), *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981–1989), and *Falcon’s Crest* (CBS, 1981–1990). In Britain, as Anthony McNicholas (no date) explains, the first soap ever created by the BBC was called *Front Line Family* and it was first broadcast in 1941. It did not initially air in Britain at all but in North America. The BBC continues to broadcast the world’s longest-running radio soap, *The Archers*, which has been running nationally since 1951. In the 1960s, *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960–) revolutionised UK television and quickly became a British institution (ibid).



Hollows (2000: 91) writes that: 'Soaps are usually characterised as continuous, open-ended, episodic serials ... Soap narratives are linear and often unfold in "real time" (Geraghty, 1991) ... and characterized by multiple narratives running simultaneously and a large body of characters which give multiple opportunities for identification'.

The home is predominantly the setting for soap opera plots, since domestic areas are culturally recognised as female spaces and encourage a feeling of familiarity among women. Mary Ellen Brown (1994:55) comments that 'the home is 'symbolic of comfort and safety for many women ... culturally the home is constructed as a positive place for women, a place where women's expertise is valued'. As Christine Geraghty (2005) explains, soaps are valued for the way they made the work of emotional relationships visible in what could be seen as a 'woman's space'. This term drew on the feminist demand that 'women engaged in political or social activity needed their own space in which terms could be discussed and re-defined before being taken out into the public world' (Geraghty, 2005:315). The centrality of women, and the predominance of stories about families, was an important element in work which sought to situate soap operas in the larger category of melodrama.

Melodrama is the central genre that television and film has utilised as the blueprint for the production of feminine narratives (Gledhill, 1987; Byars, 1991). Despite being a term of considerable complexity, Geraghty (2005:316) argues, that melodrama '... describe[s] soap's emphasis on women's voices and domestic spaces, the use of heightened *mise-en-scène* ... to express what could not be

spoken, the value placed on feeling and on moral judgments which clarified, if only temporarily, good and evil actions’.

The content and material of soap operas share links with women’s magazines. As Brown (1994:42) argues, ‘[r]eaders can look at the features and stories in magazines for possible situations and emotional dilemmas that they may face at one time or another. Women’s magazines ... [often] contain a “problem page” where solutions and advice were articulated’. Like the magazines, soap opera narratives invite viewers to participate in a problem-solving process of the characters’ lives by showing female characters who are either professional or powerful in the world outside the home negotiating family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, and emotional or moral conflicts. The emotional negotiation of these everyday experiences offer female viewers the opportunities to find their place within soap operas to talk about their lives indirectly, and gives them a type of personal space in order to identify with the characters.

Soap operas (and as I will later argue talk shows) wedge themselves nicely into a ‘woman’s culture’ by representing everyday life. Geraghty (1991:196) suggests that soap operas ‘present different aspects of female experiences in a way which allows the woman viewer to identify with the emotional dilemmas [and struggles] of female characters’. It is the engagement with the personal and ‘the emotional process involved in the handling of personal relationships - the balancing of individual’s needs, the attention paid to every word and gesture so as to understand its emotional meaning ...’ (Geraghty, 1991:43).

It is the aesthetic use of melodrama that is central to the understanding of how audiences are drawn to and establish the characters as our ‘emotional representatives’. According to Tania Modleski (1982), these characteristics of soap opera foreground the ‘female’ skills in dealing with personal domestic crises and feminine concerns. The concept of melodrama then holds a ‘feminine’ inflection since it accentuates the female qualities of expressivity, sensitivity and emotions.

Like soap operas, it can be argued that the *HTLGN* series takes place in a setting that creates a sense of familiarity for the viewers. The familiarity derives from the presentation of female body related concerns and struggles commonly experienced by women and, each week, Gok Wan introduces a new female case with her own body-image dissatisfaction. Like soap opera characters, the makeover participants develop into ‘emotional representatives’ because they address body related concerns commonly experienced by ordinary women, and this in turn allows them to identify with the participant’s narratives, body struggles, tearful expressions and gestures.

Barry Richards and Joanne Brown (2011:23) state that ‘the consumption of a particular drama can include the feeling that someone has arrived in your subjective space and allowed you to give voice to that which might otherwise be subliminal and out of conscious awareness’. Such perspectives suggest that soap opera stories and their characters’ emotional experiences, turmoil and complex everyday troubles, which are continually being worked through at an emotional and mental level, are potentially opening up a space of reassurance, support, and recognition of problems commonly experienced by the female viewer.

These assertions are central to the development of my thesis. I explore the idea that the *HTLGN* format opens up a space in which female viewers are offered the opportunity to interpret their experiences through the reflective narratives and emotional struggles that *HTLGN* makeover participants negotiate in relation to the body. In the following chapter, I will develop this further by considering the *HTLGN mise-en-scène* frame and its emotionally heightened setting as encompassing psychoanalytic features emblematic of ‘therapeutic culture’.

In building upon this chapter discussion, I will now expand on the links that reality television shares with tabloid journalism: the incorporation of ordinary people, their ‘real stories’ and the notion of emotional storytelling, all of which greatly influence the development of the makeover format.

One of the staple ingredients that reality television draws from its relationship with tabloid journalism is the ‘interplay between ordinary people and celebrities, or information and entertainment’ (Hill, 2005:13). The roots of tabloid journalism can be traced back to early forms of popular street news. Sofia Johansson (2007) notes that although the popular tabloid has a long history, it really took shape in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are two key features of the term ‘tabloid’, as Colin Sparks’ (2000:10) outlines: ‘it devotes relatively little attention to politics, economics, and society and relatively much attention to ... scandal, and popular entertainment; it devotes much attention to the personal and private lives of people, both celebrities and

ordinary people, and relatively little to political processes, economic developments, and social changes'. Elizabeth Bird (2000:215) characterises 'tabloid' as a 'storytelling' news style where the focus is on personal narratives about individuals and is 'produced at the intersection between public and private life; its style is sensational ... its tone is populist; its modality fluidly denies any stylistic difference between fiction and documentary' (Fiske, 1992:48).

This is central in understanding the influence of tabloid news on the proliferation of reality makeover television, due to the emphasis of ordinary people (and sometimes celebrities) and their private lives in everyday situations. The immense focus on the ordinary and the personal often attracts public fascination, as it generates 'narratives of the self' through the acts of storytelling. This profound shift and focus towards the personal, the real and the ordinary blurs the lines between public and private realm. Therefore, the intersection between 'the public and the private, fact and fiction highlight how tabloid journalism relies on personal and sensational stories to create informative and entertaining news ... These personal ... 'real-life' stories were distributed to the general public through popular media and oral storytelling, and particular cases would become part of everyday conversation and speculation' (Hill, 2005:15-16). For Hill (2005) the popularity of personal storytelling in both television news and print media has contributed to the proliferation of reality programming.

Personal storytelling is used to great effect in Reality TV and this aspect is largely responsible for the success of the genre, as it evokes the real-life stories of ordinary people and through them we share experiences and can potentially identify with

them. The emphasis on emotions that began to dominate reality television signals the emotionalisation of popular media. Personal storytelling takes centre stage in the makeover television format through the participants' narratives. In *How To Look Good Naked*, the personal storytelling appears in the form of self-reflection through the emotional revelations about body related troubles made by female participants. It is the inner self-disclosure and sharing of emotional experiences within the makeover discourse that resonates with the 'sensational' features employed by tabloid journalism. The experience of 'sharing emotions' (through self-reflection) will play a pivotal role in my case study analysis and in thinking psycho-culturally about the therapeutic frame that the *How To Look Good Naked* format uses to facilitate the emotional exploration of the self. As my textual analysis reveals in the following chapters, it is the sharing of emotions that allows for the possibility of emotional relatedness to transpire between the female participants and viewers (as their extension) as well as with Gok Wan himself. It is important to note that the concept of sharing emotions, and reflecting and managing them within a popular mediated space, relates to academic debates on the notion of therapy/therapeutic culture, which I will explore in Chapter 2.

As previously discussed, Reality TV owes its great success to documentary television. Voice-overs, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras, unscripted situations, and seeing events unfolding in 'real time' are documentary-style techniques that are closely associated with Reality TV and are responsible for denoting the 'factual' (Hill, 2007) in popular programming, indicating that 'this television programme is fact and not fiction ... [is]concerned with knowledge about the real world ... [and] contains facts ... [that] are true and about real issues'

(Hill, 2007:3). Reality TV is a recent form of factual programming emerging from established modes of television documentary and therefore it is important to signal the documentary style features and techniques and that have contributed directly to the development of the makeover as a popular factual format.

Documentary has a strong historical tradition within television production.<sup>2</sup> Television documentary emerged during the ‘era of scarcity’ (Ellis, 2000) in British Broadcasting and the establishment of this genre as a way of documenting the world and observing people’s real lives and experiences is part of the development of public service broadcasting (Winston, 1995). Like Reality TV, documentary is a broad category and therefore is difficult to define because, it ‘escapes any tight generic specification’ and ‘what we understand by “documentary” is always dependent on the broader context of the kinds of audiovisual documentation currently in circulation’ (Corner, 2002:125). Reality programming has borrowed various features and modes of format that are often associated with the production of documentary television. Hill (2002) argues that documentary realism and observational documentary are directly relevant in understanding the production of reality (makeover) programming.<sup>3</sup>

According to Hill (2005) observational documentary reveals a conflicting relationship with popular factual television. ‘[Observational] documentary

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘documentary’ was first coined in 1926, by the man usually considered to be one of the founding fathers of documentary, John Grierson, who defines documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ (Grierson & Hardy, 1966:13). According to Kilborn and Izod (1997:12) Grierson’s definition ‘highlights the process by which a documentarist welds various components (words, music, images and sound effects) into an artefact that can have both functional and aesthetic appeal’.

<sup>3</sup> Hill (2005:20) argues that types of documentary television that have also influenced the production of reality programming are documentary journalism, reflexive/performative documentaries, docu-drama and mock documentaries.

emerged from ‘direct cinema’ in 1960s America, ‘cinema vérité’ in 1960s France, and ‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary television in 1970s Britain’ (Hill, 2005:20). Stella Bruzzi (2001) comments that observational documentary relies on the use of lightweight, portable cameras and ‘tends to deal with current events, events that are unfolding in front of the camera’ (2001: 130). This technique clearly influenced the ‘fly-on-the-wall’ feel of docu-soaps.

Operating within the style of realism, documentary claims to produce a ‘reality effect’ (Corner, 2001:127). John Corner (2001:127) outlines two practices within documentary that rely on notions of realism. The first form he identifies is *observational realism* which is a ‘set of formal markers that confirm to us what we are watching ... is a record of an ongoing, and at least partly media independent, reality’. The second form that Corner identifies is *expositional realism*, which is a ‘rhetoric of accuracy and truth that many television documentaries variously draw on’ (ibid). This style ‘operates through a close fit between word and image, between what is seen and what is heard, and presents evidence in such a way that one outcome from the array of evidence appears inevitable and ineluctable’ (Beattie, 2004:16) and thus produces the effect that what we are seeing is a record of reality as it unfolds which is where Reality TV interlinks with documentary realism.

To address the development of this ‘catch-all category’ (Hill, 2005:2), the next section explains in what way documentary techniques, tabloid features, soap opera aesthetics blend together to create this hybrid genre, broadly defined as Reality TV. This account is significant, as it allows me to locate the arrival of lifestyle



programming as a subgenre of Reality TV and to remark on the advent and infrastructure that Lewis (2009) describes as the classic makeover format.

Drawing on the work of media theorist Corner (2000), Keith Beattie (2004) categorises the development of popular factual programming – Reality TV – in three phases. The opening phase of reality television began in the late 1980s in the United States, with NBC's *Unresolved Mysteries* in 1987 as one of the first programmes in this format (Kilborn, 1994:426)<sup>4</sup>. *America's Most Wanted* (Fox, 1989), *Real life Heroes* (CBS, 1989) and *Rescue 911* (CBS, 1989) soon followed, and established the major broadcasting trend in which 'the work of police and emergency service workers was depicted in actuality footage and dramatic re-enactments of crime and accident scenes' (Beattie, 2004: 188).

The BBC's most successful reality emergency services series was *999* (BBC1, 1992-2003). *999* was modelled on *Rescue 911*. It used reconstructions and found footage to tell stories of rescue operations by emergency services, as well as providing the viewer with first aid information, within the melodramatic narrative of accident and rescue. British adaptations of American reality programming signalled the advent of 'infotainment' (often referred to as Tabloid TV)<sup>5</sup>. Unlike its American cousin, *999* was broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and regarded as a 'serious' factual format, since the public broadcasting

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<sup>4</sup> Kilborn (1994:423) describes as reality TV programmes which involve '(a) the recording, "on the wing", and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals and groups, (b) the attempt to simulate real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction and (c) the incorporation of this material, in suitably edited form, into an attractively packaged television programme.'

<sup>5</sup> Here, it is important to remark that 'Tabloid TV' is a form of tabloid journalism.

service has historically and traditionally been associated with the production of documentary television.

Beginning in the mid-1990s and continuing through the decade, the second phase of reality television programming emerged in Britain, indicated by the success of popular observational documentaries, or ‘docu-soaps’<sup>6</sup>. Docu-soaps incorporate the formal characteristics of documentary in their use of actual locations and ‘ordinary’ people and this ‘combines observational documentary techniques with [drama] serial narrative techniques of soap opera’ (Hill, 2005:92). This multi-strand format of the drama soap is an attempt to generate narrative interest and excitement. The characters and events depicted in ‘docu-soaps’ are from everyday life but the way the stories are told – the narrative drive – is in the format of soap.

*Children’s Hospital* (BBC1, 1994-2000) was one of the highlights of docu-soaps: a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary which had all the hallmarks of a soap opera. The series offered a unique combination of melodrama, use of story-telling techniques, real-life and public information, ingredients that connect reality TV with tabloid news. *Children’s Hospital* focused on stories of sick children who return to health through the intervention of medical science. The programme used the rhetoric of ‘liveliness’, by depicting operations and allowing viewers to ‘see for themselves’ (Brunsdon, et al. 2001:42). In 1998, Hill (2000:196) reports, *Children’s Hospital* reached an audience of nearly eight million viewers.

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<sup>6</sup> *Police, Camera, Action* (ITV, 1994-2010); *Airport* (BBC1 & BBC2, 1996- 2008); *Airline* (ITV, 1998-2007).

The third phase of reality television signals the development of what John Corner (2000) calls the ‘docushow’, also known as ‘infotainment’: fitness, cookery, travel and ‘lifestyle’ programmes, and in particular makeover shows.

British lifestyle programming borrowed ideas from women’s magazines and daytime magazine formats. A precursor to peak time leisure programming was the daytime series *Style Challenge* (BBC, 1996-1998), with its focus on image transformation, and the daytime television show *This Morning* (ITV, 1988– ), featuring news and stories on real life as well as information and advice about style and beauty, home and garden, food and health.<sup>7</sup>

Hill (2005:29) writes that ‘the essence of lifestyle programming is the involvement of ordinary people and their ordinary leisure interests (home improvement, gardening, cookery, fashion and style) with experts who transform the ordinary into the extraordinary’. Hill (2005) argues that even though the transformation of people or homes is linked to a competition, the focus is not on winning but rather on the much anticipated moment of the makeover which is ‘the reveal’, and the emotional reaction of ordinary people to the end results. This is the case with the popular home renovation *Changing Rooms*, which drew on the makeover ‘along with elements from the gameshow, to heighten drama’ (Hill, 2005:30). *Changing Rooms* saw the makeover expand into full-length format and move to a primetime schedule and it ‘proved a consistent ratings winner, with

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<sup>7</sup> *This Morning* is the longest running daytime programme on British television.

regular audiences of 10 million in the UK. Unlike docu-soap, lifestyle programming has proved successful in the world' (ibid).

The success of lifestyle programming has ensured many variations of the makeover format but the most prevalent one is focused on the beauty/style personal makeover. Tania Lewis (2009) describes the classic personal makeover format:

The classic personal makeover format ... often starts with a surprise visit to the home or workplace of the unwitting participant, who has often been 'volunteered' for the role by concerned friends and family. The victim's 'deficiencies', whether in the area of health, taste and/or broader life management issues, are diagnosed by the show's resident lifestyle expert(s), with viewers (and at times the makeover recipient themselves) being shown fly-on-the-wall footage evidencing their various taste/lifestyle violations. The 'makeoveree' then undergoes a transformational new lifestyle regime under the guidance of the show's expert(s) before being shown their new self – a moment known as 'the reveal'. (Lewis, 2009:2)

The makeover show - as an unscripted format that uses hidden cameras to capture the intimate lives of ordinary people - shares much in common with the genre of reality TV. Lewis claims that 'the documentary elements of reality TV and other popular factual formats are combined in the makeover format with many of the features of melodrama, with both the transformational process and in particular 'the reveal' being highly emotional experiences for the participant ... and even the show's experts'.

My thesis then aims to signal an evolution of the makeover format by examining *HTLGN*'s transformational process in providing a form of 'cultural experience' for the female participant to creatively explore aspects of inner subjective

experience in an emotionally constructive way that enriches notions of selfhood and identity. I consider whether the makeover journey provides a parallel frame of experience for the expert himself, one that can be psychoanalytically described as therapeutic. The relationship between the expert and subject becomes central, and my psycho-cultural readings of the *HTLGN* cases presented in Chapters 4 and 5 provide psychoanalytic explanatory evidence of these claims.

In the following section, I will bring to the fore the critical debates that cross-examine the value or otherwise of reality TV in order to signal towards the psycho-cultural development of this project in studying the role of emotions and emotional impact of reality makeover television.

### **Reality debates: Framing the value of Reality TV**

Reality TV became *the* success story of television in the 1990s and 2000s and was recognised as the most watched genre in the UK. In her audience research study, Hill (2005) reports that in the year 2000, over 70 percent of the British public watched reality programmes on a regular basis. Even though the genre has been extremely popular among audiences, Reality TV has been a target for criticism and is under the regular attack that it is a cheap genre that produces passive and voyeuristic audiences.

For instance, Hill reports that media journalists criticised the popularity of *Children's Hospital*, suggesting that its viewers were 'passive ... with no critical taste, voyeurs who like to take pleasure from witnessing other people's pain,

“vulnerable” viewers who cannot tell the difference between information and entertainment, or a combination of the above’ (2002:197). On the flip side, Corner (1996:184) talks about the “psychodynamics of anxiety and security” of these types of programmes and comments on the balance between emotion and knowledge, between the public service function of the show and its almost excessive dramatic intensity, which contributes to an ‘aesthetics of attraction’ that includes the viewer experiencing risk and danger and also relief at the successful outcome of accidents depicted on screen. Hill (2000:209) argues that audiences who are watching these programs ‘feel like members of a caring society and not like voyeurs’.

From the outset, Reality TV programmes ‘addressed huge audiences in innovative ways ... the highly visible presence of ordinary people in “unscripted” situations is both the watermark of reality TV and arguably an explanation of its success’ (Biressi & Nunn, 2005:2). It is that notion of ordinariness that allows Reality TV to be successful and to be seen and ‘felt as real and authentic even when the audience are aware of its mediated and edited nature’ (Raisborough, 2011:3). Daniel Trottier (2006:260) attributes the success of reality TV to ‘its alleged ability to transcend barriers separating private and public spaces’. His claim on the reason for its success is also one of reality TV’s major criticisms, since it cultivates a form of ‘voyeuristic consumption’ amongst audiences.

Richard Kilborn (2003:11) comments that Reality TV’s primary aim is to provide ‘diversion rather than to provide enlightenment’. In a similar vein, Bignell (2005:5) argues that ‘looking at Reality TV this way as programming history that

increasingly diverges from documentary, results in the argument that Reality TV loses the authenticity and the explanation of documentary, and develops instead towards a spectacle of the everyday that emphasizes its participants' performance of identity'. For Bignell (2005:26) then the arrival of Reality TV 'signal[s] the death of documentary, killing off a great tradition of observational and socially concerned programme-making'.

However, Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2005:2) have argued that 'Reality TV altered the terrain of factual programming, drawing on and contributing to changes in television working practices, importing a newly-inflected televisual grammar, establishing new priorities for programme makers and different expectation for viewers ... it has situated itself firmly within what John Corner (2002) called "post documentary" culture'. In support of Biressi and Nunn's argument, Reality TV does not necessarily signal the demise of documentary television, but it has revealed and offered up new ways of combining various popular formats that extend documentary practices whilst at the same time accentuating Reality TV's media and cultural significance.

Despite the manifold reasons for the genre's success, there are certain traits that make it unique and popular in its own right. Evidence for its uniqueness is provided in the work of Minna Aslama and Mervi Pantti (2006:168), who argue that 'reality television exploits the self-conscious interplay of television between different genres to appeal to diverse audiences ... It not only combines documentary aesthetics with soap opera plots ... but also provides for an

untraditional array of ways for constructing selfhood through the kinds of talk that it features’.

My thesis develops Aslama and Pantti’s outlook, since it sets out to explore the frame of the *HTLGN* as a therapeutically inclined makeover method, which facilitates emotional expressivity and negotiates (and sometimes challenges) notions of selfhood through the self-reflective practices and exercises that are featured in the makeover format. My project offers a psycho-cultural study to supplement such a view and it sets out to explore the experience of the self and the role of emotion involved in reality makeover television. This is important because it allows me to explore the emotional significance and impact of reality makeover, and in particular the reflective space of the *HTLGN* format, and to discuss its capacity to open up a space of emotional (postfeminist) significance that could generate a therapeutic opportunity for its female participants and viewers by extension.

It is now important to turn this discussion and consider the production of contemporary lifestyle makeover television in response to the format’s commitment to advising the audience on everyday ways of living and the emphasis it places upon the importance of lifestyle practices and advice on “real life” concerns as well as the provision of expertise. Popular factual lifestyle advice media occupies a role in teaching the audience how to live a modern life – by offering tips on how to transform your home, relationship, business, health and personal well-being – and potentially shaping people’s identity, culture and citizenship. It can be argued that lifestyle media serve in a sense as etiquette



manuals for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following section will discuss the neoliberal aspects of the development and proliferation of contemporary lifestyle advice media.

### **The neoliberal imperatives of lifestyle media**

Lifestyle advice media encourage audiences to make the best of themselves and to optimise their opportunities for happiness, whilst minimising risk in everything from clothing to parenting. In order to fully understand the broader turn of television towards lifestyle media, it is important to consider first that it appeared at a specific historical period, when market-based practices that promote self and body regimes had reached a high point of development.

These trends can be seen to occur within the wider socio-economic context of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a rather broad and general concept referring to an economic model that arose in the 1980s and ‘has become a hegemonic signifier for “best-practice” governance’ (Leitner et al. 2007:1). The use of the term ‘neoliberalism’, as Rajesh Venugopal argues, can be divided into two very clear and distinct periods. Until the 1970s, ‘neoliberalism was used primarily to signify a category of economic ideas that arose in the 1930s–60s, associated with the Freiburg Ordoliberalism school, the Mont Pelerin Society, the work of Friedrich Hayek and the counter-Keynesian economics of the Chicago School’ (Venugopal, 2015:167). But, in the early 1980s, neoliberalism was used in a very different way, as it came to describe what Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy (2010:14) like to call ‘the “D-L-P Formula” which involved deregulation (of the economy), liberalization (of

trade and industry), privatization (of state-owned enterprises)' and the withdrawal of welfare-state. This particular time was characterised by 'a spread of market rationality into social organisation and by uncompromising individualism. Specially, unstinting privatisation, extensive policies of deregulation ... helped to fuel fierce individualism' (Raisborough, 2011:11).

In the 1980s, the notion of 'neoliberalism' expanded as a concept and 'came to signify not just a policy model, but a broader political, ideological, cultural, spatial phenomenon' (Venugopal 2015:168). The concept of neoliberalism comes in several strands and variations, but the function of neoliberalism as 'a mode of governance' is of great significance for the understanding of the view of makeover as a neoliberal 'project of the self' (Giddens, 1991) where 'reinvention' becomes a personal responsibility and individual choice becomes a practice of 'good' citizenship. The neoliberal mode of governance 'adopts the self-regulating free market model as *the* model of proper government' and addresses its citizens more as 'customers' or 'clients' (Steger & Roy, 2010:12-3). The dimension of neoliberalism 'as a mode of governance' refers to what the French social thinker Michel Foucault (1997) called 'governmentalities'. He defines it as 'the conduct of conduct' thus giving the term a meaning ranging from 'governing the self' to 'governing others' (Foucault, 1983:220-1). This is a power 'designed to observe, monitor, shape and control the behaviour of individuals' (Gordon, 1991:3). A neoliberal form of governmentality entails a particular kind of spatiality: 'government at a distance' (Rose, 1999:49) and is rooted in entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness, self-interest, and decentralization.

Governmental technologies help construct neoliberal subjectivities because under neoliberalism, individuals feel empowered to actively make self-interested choices that favour their well-being rather than that of society. Neoliberalism celebrates individual empowerment and characteristically develops indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without at the same time being responsible for them. The neoliberal strategy of rendering individual subjects as ‘responsible for themselves’ signals a shift in responsibility: any social risk, such as illness, poverty or unemployment is now attributed to individual ‘choice’ and lack of ‘self-care’. In the following two chapters this discussion of neoliberalism will be developed in response to neoliberal critiques around therapy culture and the view of the self as vulnerable and emotionally deficient, part of a ‘postfeminist sensibility’, where individual achievements are measured and reduced down to bodily appearance.

The liberal political and economic policies introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s had a direct result on the increased output of the media industries. Media scholar Jayne Raisborough argues that ‘the natural laws and rhythms of free markets can spur competition, efficiently distribute and utilise resources, secure social justice and produce economic growth’ (Raisborough, 2011:11). This period was a significant time for television scheduling history, because it signalled the development of television from the ‘era of scarcity’ to the ‘era of availability’ (Ellis, 2000:61). The convergence of telecommunications, computers and media ensured competition between the networks and cable and satellite channels to secure revenue (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). This multi-channel ‘availability’ allowed audiences to shop around, channel surfing between terrestrial, satellite/cable and digital channels. It is important to note that ‘lifestyle TV owes its ... popularity to

the process of neoliberal deregulation – the explosion of channels and production companies have privileged the relatively cheap-to-produce formats’ (Raisborough, 2011:11). These formats were attractive both to the general public and to niche viewers and generated commercial revenue for independent producers and advertisers alike. However, this economic analysis is only one part of the story, since the rise and proliferation of these formats can also be linked to a number of wider socio-cultural developments and ‘in particular the “lifestyling” of contemporary existence’ (Lewis, 2009:3).

Throughout the 1980s, the concept of lifestyle became central to debates about transformation in consumer culture and cultural identities. This was frequently articulated in relation to shifts identified within post-Fordism and/or postmodernist society (Bell Hollows, 2006). The term ‘lifestyle’ has not only become a contemporary common sense term but is also central to contemporary consumer culture. It is directly connected to neoliberal values since it places emphasis on individualization and personal choice. Lifestyle becomes a way of drawing together ‘a range of concepts such as taste, income, health, status, diet, aspiration, subculture and leisure in order to represent everyday life in advanced capitalist cultures as an accretion of *personal style achieved primarily through consumption*’ (Jagose, 2003:109, italics in original). Therefore, one’s body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences can be regarded as ‘indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer’ (Featherstone, 1991:83). Consequently, the concept of lifestyle is an expression of individuality, self-expression, and stylistic self-consciousness.

The idea of lifestyle is then underpinned by a conception of identity that foregrounds personal choice and the malleable nature of the self. As a result, our daily lifestyle choices play an important role in defining and constructing our identity, especially given its flexible accommodations of not just consumer products but also products of practices for self-knowledge and self-improvement.

As Anthony Giddens (1991:81) suggests, the notion of lifestyle is part of a broader ‘detraditionalisation’ of life today: in place of ‘handed down’, fixed identity positions based on tradition, lifestyle emphasises choice, change and reflexivity. Therefore, ‘the more post-traditional setting in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of identity, its making and remaking’ (Giddens, 1991:81). Therefore, lifestyle media become a ‘project of the self’ as they aim to produce, circulate and promote ideas and choices that can potentially play an essential role in re-defining our identity and indicate ways in which an individual can improve oneself and/or (re)define one’s identity. Lifestyle themes and topics can include fashion styling, grooming, property development, as well as self-improvement through the body, clothes, emotionally and/or spiritually. All of these topics blend into lifestyle media.

An important feature of the contemporary lifestyle makeover is its focus on offering advice on real life concerns as well as the provision of expertise. Lewis (2009:7) reminds us that makeover television has genealogical links to other forms of lifestyle advice programming on television such as daytime magazine shows, DIY and cooking shows as well as to popular advice culture more broadly. In the following section, I will address the historical links that the lifestyle makeover

shares with British and leisure advice media and explore the talk shows that inform a self-improvement genre.

### **From advice media to lifestyle TV**

Television in the immediate post-war period in the UK rapidly became a symbol of modernity and ever since, British lifestyle media has had a long history in television, with programmes related to gardening, home improvement and decoration as well as to self-grooming. The roots of lifestyle television in the post-war British television schedule emerged ‘from pre-war radio and magazines ... [and] a wartime preoccupation with gardening, cookery and matters related to the home’ (O’Sullivan, 2005:31). Traditional lifestyle programmes were about popular leisure pursuits, such as DIY or cookery, and typically contain instructions on how to look after your garden, or how to make a meal. The BBC has been one of the main providers of lifestyle television. The BBC actively developed its range of daytime leisure programming by building on its existing formats in leisure and advice media shows, since British television has a long tradition of modes of leisure as well as advice programming.

Leisure programming refers to ‘a strand of television usually associated with daytime television’ (Hill, 2005:22). An American concept at first, daytime television first appeared in the 1950s, just after the end of the Second World War at a time where there was ‘an anxiety about returning women to domesticity’ (Morris, 2007:50). Harley informs us that daytime television was a joint effort made by the government and commercial agencies to persuade women to feel

content and interested with home life and their domestic duties (Hartley, 2001:92). In the era of mass persuasion, it was as much about trying to get people to take satisfaction from their role as domestic consumers as it was about selling individual brands and products. As a result, daytime television would not only have the power to promote goods and enhance consumption, as Hartley points out, but also it was a means by which the very 'ideology of domesticity' would make things acceptable and available to wider society. What emerged from this then was a psycho-profile of the 'housewife' and the desires projected on to her, which daytime TV then sought to satisfy (Hartley, 2001:92). My thesis explores a cultural trend that signals that women's desire for domesticity has been substituted with a desire to reflectively engage in consuming 'feel good', self-reflective and therapy-based practices and products, all of which aim to enhance women's psychological 'well-being' whilst keeping them constantly preoccupied in correcting their emotional deficits. Chapter 2 expands on this cultural trend and addresses this question by linking the emergence of the *HTLGN* approach as a neoliberal product of so-called therapy culture.

In the 1960s and 1970s, British leisure programming was very instructional and focused on the advice of the expert. The format and Do-it-Yourself (DIY) mode of address were generally about gardening, construction, cooking, and dressmaking, all of which 'imply a narrative of transformation', and focused solely on 'skill acquisition' (Brunsdon et al., 2001: 54) and on the knowledge of the expert.

The experts of these programmes addressed either the male or the female viewer separately, based on the nature of the programme, e.g. Barry Bucknell's DIY series *Bucknell's House* (BBC, 1962), which spoke directly to male viewers in teaching them construction based skills on how to re-build a shed and/or the house. This is an example of this type of gender segregation of the audience. Alternatively, leisure programs that addressed predominantly female viewers focused on domestic themes such as cooking, knitting and fashion. This was the case with Pam Dawson's BBC2 series *Knitting Fashion* (1976), where her guidance and advice focused on teaching women how to master knitting practices and techniques, whilst promoting in her series the concept of knitting as a 'labour of love' and as an important skill for women to acquire. The concept of knitting as a labour of love supports Hartley's (2001) view on how desires of domesticity are projected onto women through leisure programming, and therefore creates a profile specification on what women are expected to achieve in the domestic space in a specific timeframe. In Chapter 3, I address the way in which postfeminist media culture, i.e. print media, enhances a constant body image preoccupation and the practices that are promoted for the pursuit and attainment of the 'perfect' female silhouette. This discussion will fuel my psychoanalytic consideration of the emotional body image concerns that ordinary British women have to face, when they find themselves failing to fit into the narrow measurements of the 'postfeminist' dress and the unrealistic images promoted by postfeminist media culture.



Television has always been focused on the domestic sphere, but since the early 1990s has taken an increased interest in the personal and is said to be ‘more ordinary than it used to be’ (Taylor, 2002:479) due to the ordinariness of lifestyle television. One of the key strategies that British media have employed as a means of urging people to incorporate lifestyle practice into their everyday lives is that of ‘ordinari-ization’ (Brunsdon et al., 2001:53). The ‘ordinari-ization’ of lifestyle programmes fasten onto the sense that we are all, insofar as we connect to the backdrop of everyday life, ordinary; we are all somehow anchored to routine, to a place called home and to the mundanity of daily habit (Taylor, 2004:482). The enactment of lifestyle ideas is rooted in the hum-drum rhythms and practices of the quotidian and as Frances Bonner (2003) suggests, ‘ordinary television’ requires the similarities between the worlds of the programme and the viewer to be stressed and thus addresses three aspects of television that contribute to its ordinary appeal.

First, there is the mundaneness of its concerns that transpires through infotainment’s focus on the domestic, i.e. home, garden, food, clothing. Secondly, there is the style of presentation, that usually takes place in a television studio, which mimics the domestic setting, or on location in the homes of ordinary people which, like a soap opera studio, encourages a sense of familiarity, intimacy and comfort experienced by the participants as well as the viewers.

Thirdly, there is the move from the authoritative to a more informal mode of address by the (lifestyle) presenters, that of ‘conversationalization’ (Fairclough, 1995:9). The notion of ‘conversationalization’ in this context is suggestive of the

incorporation of everyday language in television. As a result, the regional accents, use of slang and the way of talking and writing aim to de-emphasize authority and play on chattiness and friendliness, which in turn make television more accessible and inclusive. The lifestyle knowledge that is presented in contemporary formats has replaced the authoritative and formal mode of address of the 1970s advice programming, and it signalled the commercial development of the BBC into 'popular public service' (Ellis, 2000:32). The notion of 'conversationalization' that is now employed by contemporary lifestyle experts is not only reassuring of friendliness but encourages intimacy to be formed. In Chapter 5, I investigate three characteristics of Gok Wan that contribute to the widely recognised view of him as the 'one who cares'. Gok Wan's voice, touch and capacity for empathy will be put under the microscope for psychoanalytic scrutiny.

Lifestyle programming in Britain both feeds into and contributes to the nation's preoccupation with style and outlets for styling life, with home and gardening proliferating as never before. The British Broadcast Cooperation (BBC) has been one of the biggest providers of lifestyle television, and such programming has engaged scholars/critics in debates about the changing status and 'definition of public-service broadcasting' (Palmer, 2004:173). For Tim O'Sullivan (2005), the scale and changing dynamic of lifestyle programmes, and their ability to mobilise audiences as they do in current times, can be seen as a defining feature of contemporary British television and modernity (Giddens, 1991). The expansion of lifestyle TV has triggered debates around cultural decline, the decimation of older forms of factual programming and the trivialisation of TV content.

A growing body of work has evaluated the significance, history and politics of lifestyle television (Bell and Hollows, 2005; Brundson, 2003; Moseley, 2000). Several studies have explored the construction of the expert in television talk programmes (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Simon-Vandenberg, 2007; Wood, 2001). Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), these works have primarily focused upon the notion of class and taste, rudiments that constitute Britain's lifestyle preoccupations. Moreover, research has been conducted by media academics on the role of gender in such shows (Gill, 2007a; McRobbie, 2009; Wood, 2009; Lewis, 2009).

The makeover has become a staple of contemporary lifestyle series in Britain and its place in primetime television came to dominate schedules in the 1990s where advice, transformation and consumer awareness became part of the language of lifestyle television for popular audiences (Bonner, 2003:130-1). However, where daytime television makeovers focused on issues of personal style and fashion, the first successful makeover format were shows oriented towards investing in and improving the home rather than the self. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *Changing Rooms* was one of the first breakthrough makeover shows. The BBC series mixed personal stories with home improvement and with general tips on interior design. Unlike the gender segregation observed in British leisure programmes of the 1960s and 1970s, the contemporary lifestyle makeover format addressed both male and female viewers by blending 'soft' feminine interior design with the 'harder' construction and carpentry focus associated with DIY.

Characteristically, *Changing Rooms* contains the story of two sets of neighbours who transform each other's living space according to a design brief, budget and time frame provided by the programme. A presenter judges the progress of the two teams, and provides humorous commentary on the style changes taking place and a team of interior designers assists the teams, and compete against each other to make bold design statements for the ordinary people in the programme and to viewers at home. In the following chapter, and in response to cultural debates around therapy culture and/or therapeutic culture, I present a development of the makeover format by signposting a cultural shift in the makeover frame and in the position and role of the lifestyle expert and host in the setting. *Changing Rooms* constitutes the starting point where this makeover development is initiated and recognised. This makeover account will provide the framework for my psycho-culturally discussion of Gok Wan and his role in *HTLGN*.

In the 2000s, the makeover transformed itself and was no longer limited to homes and gardens, but expanded to incorporate ordinary people and their way of life. Nowadays, we can watch (and copy) ordinary people transforming their business practices or personal relationships, as well as their living arrangements or personal appearances. Indeed, personal makeover stories, or what the BBC calls 'narrative lifestyle' (Hill, 2005:93), are fundamental to contemporary lifestyle formats that attempt to consider the transformation of the self, as well as the transformation of the home environment. According to Bonner, 'makeover programmes are the most overt signs of the way television perceives itself to be engaged in a project of advising its ordinary viewers about their transformation into happier, more satisfied, more up-to-date versions of their selves' (Bonner, 2003:136).

Contemporary lifestyle television programmes offer ‘narratives of the self’ that are less about leisure pursuits, and more about life in general. In the context of makeover television, such issues are framed within the (now highly familiar) logic of the 'before and after' transformation.

As in lifestyle television, an important genre centrally concerned with self-improvement is the talk show – a televisual space where we see the role of lifestyle advisors and experts come to the fore, and where ‘ordinary’ people are encouraged to confess and thus talk about their often social deviant lifestyles and behaviours. In the following section, I will look in more detail at the notion of makeover discourse as a potentially therapeutic space, by examining its links to other popular genres where a therapeutic inclination has been revealed. More particularly, I will comment on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* as an exemplar of a therapeutic discourse. Talking about ordinary feminine issues and articulating women’s emotional experiences is a central characteristic of the popular talk show format, and contemporary makeover television draws upon talk show conventions, ‘especially through the representation of “ordinary” people and their privileged place in the mobilisation of feeling’ (Sender, 2012:31). Central to Gok Wan’s makeover method is the psychological mechanism of self-reflection, where the expert invites ordinary British women to talk about, make sense and/or interpret their emotional despairs and body related experiences. The notion of ‘talk’, and the articulation of emotions and subjective experiences in relation to the body, is central to my psychoanalytic reading of the series in locating *HTLGN*’s therapeutic opportunity.

### ***Oprah's Couch: A therapeutically inclined show***

Television is a machine for assembling images and organising speech. It invites us to listen as well as to look. Television programmes are filled with voices – recounting, arguing, proposing, explaining, joking (Murdock, 2000:198). The diversity of talk on television is central to its appeal (Corner, 1999:45). Talk on television and in various forms of talk shows has attracted popular and academic criticism. Talk shows have been critically described as ‘cultural rot’ responsible for ‘dumbing down ... contemporary culture’ (Woods, 2009:13). Talk shows have often blurred the boundaries between public and private and ‘have helped to make public issues that we once silenced and taboo, and have rendered them “talkable about by everyone”...’ (Gill, 2007:179). Talk shows privilege the notion of ““common sense” and everyday life - world experiences ...’ (Wood, 2009:22). They acknowledge that women’s concerns that are embedded in the private sphere, such as family, the body, domestic labour, and sexuality, are political and ought to be talked about in the public domain and not remain silent or unspoken.

In the domain of popular culture, women’s talk has often been associated with terms such as “gossip and gibberish” (Kramer, 1977:157), and ordinary women are often derided as “empty vessels” and at the same time are encouraged to be silent. Helen Wood (2009) claims that there is a relatively long tradition in feminist politics of relating the gendering of the speech to the persistence of gender inequalities. So, while ‘women chatter, tattle, grab, rabbit, nag, bitch, men devote themselves to more consequential tasks ... [and] they do not hang about nattering’ (Emler, 1994:118). Wood argues that the ‘devaluation of woman’s talk as “gossips” assists in containing woman’s voices within the private sphere, since

their conversations are not deemed serious enough for rational and critical debate within the public sphere' (Wood, 2009:16). By tradition, the public and private spheres have been associated with essential characteristics of masculinity and femininity that usually depend upon 'woman' symbolizing nature and 'man' culture (Landes, 1998). In the political arena, men have been associated with serious, rational political debate, which belongs to the realm of the public sphere, whereas women are associated with the emotional, personal and private realm of the domestic, which is ultimately invisible and silenced.

Talk shows, like their cousin soap operas, construct what Annette Kuhn calls 'woman-centred narratives and identifications' (Kuhn, 1987:339). Talk shows recognise women as citizens by allowing their ordinary voices to be heard, and recognise their everyday concerns, worries and struggles as politically significant. Wood (2009) argues that talk shows offer a space where women are taken seriously as speakers and listeners and their authentic experiences are endorsed (2009:24), thus aiming 'to build up women's self-esteem, confidence and identity in a space where advice is shared within a group' (Shattuc, 1997:122). To further support this claim, Wood (2009: 9) adds that 'these programs encourage, facilitate, and broadcast talk, and "talk" more generally has been at the centre of feminist concerns. In the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, women were encouraged to speak to each other, to speak of the 'problem' that had no name'.

Wood's reflection on the importance of talk shows as a facilitating space for women forms the backdrop of later exploration of the makeover discourse as creating a 'safe' postfeminist space, where various stages and experiences of

modern-day womanhood can be expressed, safely voiced and culturally acknowledged in a meaningful way. Chapter 3 explores *HTLGN* from a postfeminist perspective and discusses how the makeover frame creates a platform where current feminine subjective experiences of body related concerns and frustrations can be explored, discussed, reflected upon and potentially worked through. Extending Wood's ideas further, my project examines the concept of the facilitating space from an object relations psychoanalytic perspective. Borrowing Winnicott's term of the 'facilitating environment', my thesis explores *HTLGN* as a space that offers the opportunity for ordinary British women to reflect emotionally and to overcome their body related troubles and anxieties, and to give voice to current emotional themes of womanhood that were previously hidden and culturally unacknowledged. It is through the reflective feminine space of *HTLGN* that women can negotiate their experience and achieve improved self-confidence, self-esteem and gain an emotional understanding.

The talk show is as old as American broadcasting and borrows its basic characteristics from those of 'nineteenth century popular culture, such as tabloids, women's advice columns and melodrama' (Shattuc, 1997:3). Morse writes that 'the television talk show bears some resemblance to the news magazine show; however, while the news magazine is addressed directly to the home viewer, the talk show is distinguished by the visible and/or audible presence of a studio audience as explicit narratee; the viewer occupies implied discourse space or is placed "in" the studio audience' (Morse, 1985:10)



The celebrity talk show has been a staple of late night programming in America since the success of *The Tonight Show* (NBC, 1954– ) in the 1950s. In the mid-1970s, Phil Donahue pioneered what has been called the “new” talk show, which organised around topics, focusing on “ordinary” (rather than famous) people, and featuring hosts who have abandoned their place on stage to encourage audience questions and comments’ (Peck, 1995:61). As the celebrity guest gave way to ordinary people, the studio audience became even more active in emotionally laden stories that became trademark of confessional talk shows. Confessional talk shows encapsulate a ‘tension between commercial tabloid exploitation and the politicisation of the private sphere’ (Shattuc, 2001: 84). This tension between entertainment imperatives within television programming and the use of personal stories within public debate is also apparent in reality makeover programming.

The confession or the baring of private feelings and acts in public is emblematic of American talk shows that started in the 1980s and went on during the 2000s. The first confessional or ‘issue-orientated’ (Shattuc, 2001:84) genre can be traced to the 1980s and is best exemplified by *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* was shown in sixty countries and is considered ‘the top-rated daytime talk show in the U.S. with a daily audience of 14 million, of whom 76% are women 18 years of age and older’ (Peck, 1995:76). The Oprah talk show is oriented around women’s concerns via ‘feminine narrative’ conventions, and directed at a primarily female audience (Peck, 1995:58). The show’s format is consistent:

Winfrey introduced each episode by reading an outline of the day’s topic to camera, talks to guests, solicits a few questions from the

audience, brings in some experts' opinion, and then alternates guests', experts'; and audience members' comments while she roams around the audience with a microphone. (Squire, 1997:100)

While incorporating makeover shows, celebrity interviews and socio-political discussions, the focus of the programme was primary psychological. *The Oprah* show integrated the real-life stories of ordinary people and opened up spaces for dialogue and emotional expression. Each episode focused on various social issues such as alcoholism, depression, addiction, racism, abuse etc. and dealt with these publicly. The narrative of the show's mission was to empower, heal and offer reassurance to the people in the studio while at the same time reaching out to its viewers as an extension of them.

The *Oprah* show is defined by Gill as 'therapeutic', since it is suffused with psychoanalytic language: repression, desire and denial, everyday concepts that are selectively drawn from Freud, American ego psychology, rational emotive therapy and cognitive behavioural approaches. The narratives of the show work towards 'a psychological closure – feeling better because of having expressed oneself, or brought an issue to public attention or unpacked a difficult issue to come to better understanding of what one really wants' (Gill, 2005:159).

Janice Peck states that:

Conflict and crisis are ... at the heart of daytime talk shows [like Oprah's since it is] fuelled by social tensions that originate "outside" the shows, but are "inside" where they become the condition of the talk ... holding out the possibility that talking will lead to, or is itself a form of resolution. The belief that communication can guide people out of their dilemmas makes the [show] compatible with therapeutic discourse; their relational focus and therapeutic orientation makes them appealing to female viewers. (Peck, 1995:59)

The therapeutic turn in the talk show has been recognised as a feminising of the genre (Shattuc, 1997). Oprah Winfrey has been seen to champion the feminist cause in the “TV-talk-as-therapy-genre” (Masciarotte, 1991; Squire, 1994; Landeman, 1995; Shattuc, 1997) while more cynical readings of the show again see the theatre of the event as dominating the discourse, whereby individual pain is used as voyeuristic commercial composition.

Talk shows are representative of confession, as they provide an open discourse in which intimate speaking is ‘validated as part of quest for psychic health, as part of our right to selfhood’ (Dovey, 2000:107). Consequently, confession became a therapeutic discourse in the sense that it was not so much part of the process of recovery and empowerment but more about managing emotions and working to empower yourself — mechanisms that are dominant in the neoliberal agenda.

Jane Shattuc (1997:123) argues that the therapeutic discourse offered by the talk show draws upon Freud’s concept of the “talking cure”. The term ‘talking cure’ is typically credited to Breuer and published by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud in their classic early collaborative work, *Studies in Hysteria* (1895). One of Breuer’s patients coined the term as a means of means of self-healing and giving the cure its name. That is “Anna O.” (Bertha Pappenheim), who ‘under the form of “autohypnosis” (in Breuer’s presence) “talked out” the traumatic experiences undergirding her hysteric symptoms’ (Davis, 1999:154). For this procedure Anna O. jokingly referred to it as ‘chimney-sweeping’ (Breuer and Freud, 1893-1895:30), or free association, as we call it today. The talk show’s purpose is the

ongoing production of talk and its appeal is based on the possibility of resolution, and the fact that talking itself is a solution. Talk shows are sites for the popularised display of the “talking cure”, where the act of communicating is intended to lead to new information, insights, and identities.

Rosalind Gill (2005) proposes that talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* represent a new ‘regime of truth’ and a forerunner of what Nikolas Rose (1989) views as a rise of the ‘new therapeutic culture of the self’.

Talk shows sustain and help to bring into being a new concept of the self as an inner state which needs to be monitored, supervised taken care of through psychological techniques that allow the person to purge, relax, stay calm and reach a state of (individual psychological) well-being. This notion of the individual is perfectly suited to neoliberal democracies where discourses of structural inequality or power difference are fast disappearing and individuals are exhorted to live their lives through notions of autonomy, self-reinvention and limitless choices. (Gill, 2005:171).

For Mark Andrejevic (2004), the confession and the revelation of true emotions on camera, where ordinary people admit their mistakes, emotions and regrets in talk shows, makeover programmes and so on, often serve as a ‘learning experience ... [and] getting in touch with themselves and others’ (2004:108). In addition, he comments that ‘the willingness to be “open” on camera [equates]... with “being real”, and, consequently, with personal growth (Andrejevic, 2004:109).

In a similar vein, Aslama and Pantti argue that ‘the preoccupation with the internal life of the individual leads to a new representation of self in terms of the emotional determinism which celebrates public display of feelings as a means of therapeutic disclosure and regards one’s feeling as a foundation of authenticity, the true self’

(Aslama & Pantti, 2006: 181). Following this statement, it can be argued that the combination of strategies of surveillance and the rituals of confession also mark the appearance of therapy culture and the therapeutic/confessional trend in first-person television, which Jon Dovey (2000) has described as indicative of the new emotional democracy of feminised public life.

John Ellis (2000) signals that our involvement in television as viewers, through our emotional engagement with soap opera series and its characters as well as with talk shows narrative accounts of everyday concerns, entails one continuous 'working through'. He comments:

Television works over new material for its audiences as a necessary consequence of its position of witness. Television attempts definitions, tries out explanations, creates narratives, talks over, makes intelligible, tries to marginalize, harnesses speculation, tries to make fit, and, very occasionally, anathemizes ... working through is a constant process of making and remaking meanings and of exploring possibilities (79) ... Yet for even the most isolated viewer, broadcast television's sense of being together [while being apart] is the basis of working through (177).

Ellis's work is relevant to my research as it forms the backdrop of my study in exploring the role of emotions in the makeover frame. As we move towards the emergence of 'therapeutic culture', witnessing begins to take the form of a more therapeutic character, one that allows audiences to interpret and make sense of their experience in a meaningful way. Contemporary popular culture is now awash with examples of personal testimony: telling the self, working on the self and potentially transforming oneself in order to attain happiness and achieve emotional well-being becomes culturally embedded in reality makeover TV formats. As Dovey (2000:154) accurately describes, 'the changing of the self-accompanies the

rise of neo-liberalism and the breakdown of social arrangements' (Dovey, 2000:154). Therefore, reflexivity and the re-articulation of self-experience becomes a feature of modernity. The notion of therapy culture, which has been briefly discussed above in relation to the talk show, will be expanded further in the following chapter in order to scrutinise the emergence of therapeutic culture. Departing from *Oprah's* (neoliberal) couch, I will develop the view of the makeover format in framing emotions 'on the couch', and signal the emergence of *HTLGN's* parallels with the rise of therapy culture and foreground the significance of the therapeutic discourse. Framing the makeover as 'on the couch', my work re-thinks critically the cultural processes surrounding the role of emotion in contemporary makeover culture, as well as thinking psycho-culturally about the affective impact and value of the makeover in shaping subjective experiences and notions of selfhood.

Academic scholars have documented how lifestyle makeover programming engages with questions around notions of identity, class, family, gender, personal aspiration and the potential empowerment of its audience (Palmer, 2004; Holmes and Jermyn, 2004; Bell and Hollows, 2005; Heller, 2007; Gill, 2007a; Lewis, 2007; Ouellette and Hay, 2008b). The work of Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008b) provides scrutiny of reality makeover television programmes, such as *Extreme Makeover*, *What Not To Wear*, *10 Years Younger*, *Supernanny* (Channel 4, 2004-2008), *Survivor* (CBS, 2000 - ) and *Wife Swap* (Channel 4, 2003-2009). The authors explore the meaning of the notion of transformation in all the different aspects of a person's life. They apply Foucault's theory of governmentality to address what they see as the changing relationship between television and social

welfare, thus, linking reality TV to broader shifts between the self and the social-political. An important dimension of TV as a cultural technology concerns self-cultivation as self-improvement and self-reliance. Their emphasis here is drawn on the ‘care of the self’ through television programmes that are working as technologies of governance in prescribing ‘techniques of the self’ to individuals, in order to determine their identity, maintain it and transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery and self-knowledge. Whereas Ouellette and Hay link the self-disciplining to shifts in US socio-political culture and individualisation of self-care, and while my project recognises the social backdrop of their argument and their Foucauldian emphasis regarding reality TV, I will attempt to negotiate and think through potentially more positive aspects of therapeutic culture through the discipline of psychoanalysis.

Drawing on Gok Wan’s case, my research hypothesis is that makeover television can create therapeutic opportunities where ‘ordinary’ British women can reflect on, interpret and potentially work through their body related issues, and overcome their emotional despair. It is the incorporation of self-reflective practices, which form part of the makeover process, which allows me to consider the programme’s therapeutic possibility for its subject and viewers as an extension of them. It is through self-reflection that an enriched sense of self can be achieved and emotional understanding in relation to the body can be attained - a view that reflects the importance of psychoanalysis. A distinctive component of my research is the view of makeover television in facilitating prolific opportunities for its participants, where their identities can be played out, explored, (re)discovered but also (re)created in an attempt to explore hidden and unexplored aspects of self-

experience. Therefore, my thesis argues that reality makeover genres wield cultural value, since they have the potential to create a therapeutic space as it focuses on the role of emotions in the development of the self.

Even though the body of work by media academics offers an important historical and socio-cultural approach towards the re-innovation and the on-going change of reality makeover TV and the power of transformation, there is not much emphasis put on the role of emotion in such programmes. In my research, I aim to prioritise the role of emotions in such programmes and rethink the work of these programmes via psycho-cultural and psychoanalytic inflection, by building on the few previous examples where this is done (Biressi & Nunn, 2005; Ferguson, 2010; Jensen, 2011; Whitehouse-Hart, 2014; Wood, 2009). Turner (2010:39) comments that there is plenty of reality format television that has an explicitly public good or pedagogic purpose. This includes formats such as *Supernanny* (Channel 4, 2004-2008; E4, 2010-2012), *You Are What You Eat* (Channel 4, 2004-2007), *How To Look Good Naked* and suggests that whether one can or cannot view them as entertainment, all set out to produce what most would regard as better outcomes for their contestants, and offer a learning opportunity for the viewers that has a therapeutic outcome. My original psycho-cultural approach to the study of makeover television proposes to explore such therapeutic opportunity for the female participants and, by extension, its viewers, by scrutinising the role of emotions in such formats.

As noted in my thesis introduction, a ‘chapter interlude’ will now follow which will provide notes on the methodology in response to the psycho-cultural



arrangement of this project on makeover culture. During this brief interlude, I will offer a psychoanalytic account of the object relations ideas that will be applied in response to each chapter discussion and explain the way in they will be applied to the makeover text in order to serve the psycho-cultural development of the thesis. In addition, a descriptive account of the *HTLGN* episode selection will be provided as well as how the makeover text will be presented through this thesis. An explanatory account that reflects on my role and position as the researcher of this project will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER INTERLUDE**

### **Notes on the methodology**

The purpose of this research project is the application of object relations psychoanalysis to the study of reality makeover television, as a means of investigating the emotional and psychological investments involved in the genre's programmes. The intention is to explore the role of the media in shaping, understanding and discovering our sense of identity, as they become objects of our internal world. Thus, it aims to formulate a psycho-cultural study of the makeover format and its significance in contemporary emotional experience. An important feature of the psycho-cultural approach is the value it places on the significance of object relations psychoanalysis as a tool for exploring the role of emotions in the media and cultural framework.

In the following section, I intend to outline the object relations psychoanalytic ideas that will facilitate the psycho-cultural development on the study of makeover television and I will provide commentary on how I intend to apply psychoanalytic ideas to the text format and why I have chosen these particular episodes for my case study analysis.

Object relations psychoanalysis attempts to explain the vicissitudes of human relationships through the study of how internal representations of the self and others are structured. Object relations theory was developed by Klein and

Winnicott, who are considered to be important theorists of the British object relations school. Object relations theory is a school within psychoanalysis, which is built on the work of Freud, but with a slightly different focus. While Freud's work focuses on the individual's impulses, dreams and the unconscious, the object relations thinker concentrates on the individual interpretational relationship, with particular focus on early life and early object relationships. Early object relationships are essential elements in Winnicott's thought.

For Winnicott it is impossible to speak about a baby, without paying attention to the relational context, since the baby's development is facilitated by the environmental provision. Winnicott (1960b:587), in his most famous statement, writes: 'There is no such thing as an infant, meaning, of course, that whenever one finds an infant one finds maternal care, and without maternal care there would be no infant'. Therefore, the relationship between the baby and the mother and the role of the mother is central to Winnicott and for the psycho-cultural development of this thesis.

Winnicott's concept of the 'holding [or facilitating] environment' is central in framing the psychoanalytic discussion of the *HTLGN* experience as a 'facilitating environment'. Winnicott defines the facilitating environment as the 'total environmental provision' (Winnicott, 1960b: 589), of which physical holding, or handling, is an element. In Chapter 3, I will ground the discussion of *HTLGN* as offering up a postfeminist opportunity of a 'facilitating environment', where current feminine body related anxieties are safely voiced and emotionally expressed in a safe space. To support the development of Chapter's 3 postfeminist

discussion, my work will foreground Melanie Klein's concept of splitting (Klein, 1946, 1957, 1998), in which 'states of gratification' and 'states of frustration' are attached to different objects (the 'phantastic' good and bad breasts), and are understood psycho-culturally as a process of simultaneous idealisation and denigration. Klein's work will be employed to facilitate the development of Chapter 3, in order to psycho-culturally signal how the media definition of the ideal good body is internalised by ordinary women and how this internalisation produces feelings of frustration towards their 'real' and fallible bodies. In addition, and by drawing on the work of Suzy Gordon (2007), I will provide a reflective commentary on Klein's theory on the importance of 'negativity' and the way in which violence and destructiveness can generate 'the provision of possibility' in the makeover frame.

The formation of identity or the sense of self is a main topic in Winnicott's work and its origins are situated in the 'mother-infant relationship' (Winnicott, 1960a; 1960b; 1960c), primary play and 'transitional experience' (Winnicott, 1971). Winnicott's ideas about 'transitional experience' are not only relevant to the study of infants' emotional development but also of adulthood and 'cultural experience' (Winnicott, 1971). All these concepts will be employed in detail to facilitate the textual analysis of the *HTLGN* format.

In particular, my case study analysis (Chapter 4) presents a parallel reading of Winnicott's concept of the mother who is 'good enough' (which does not mean she is perfect) and the function of Gok Wan in the setting. For Winnicott, the 'good enough mother' matches the needs of her baby, and identifies with the

needs of the infant in order to actualise what the baby is ready to find. It is through this relationship that the infant experiences communication and comes to its own realisation, which enables it to have confidence and develop its capacity to live creatively in the external world.

Winnicott's concepts of 'transitional space', the 'transitional object' and 'playing' are central to activating the infant's capacity to emotionally relate to 'objects' and through them to creatively explore aspects of inner self-experience. These ideas will be addressed in my case study analysis (Chapter 4) through Winnicott's relational mode from 'object-relating' to 'object-use' (Winnicott, 1971), which will be applied throughout the procedural process of the case study. The capacity to use an object in Winnicott's terms activates the infant's capacity to 'play'. Play is central to health, emotional growth and it is only through play that the infant/child/adult can creatively engage in cultural activities that give rise to the possibility of self-discovery which forms the primary basis of 'cultural experience' (Winnicott, 1971).

Additionally, in Chapter 4, my work makes use of Christopher Bollas's (1987) concept of the 'transformational object' to address the symbolic function of the makeover expert in facilitating the makeover journey of his female participants. The application of these concepts will frame the psycho-cultural reading of the thesis that sets out to examine the cultural value and therapeutic opportunity of Gok Wan's makeover approach as well as locate the cultural position of the expert in the format and in contemporary media landscape.

Chapter 5 further enhances my argument that the *HTLGN* space offers a ‘holding environment’. It scrutinises several functions of the makeover expert to meet the physical and psychological needs of his female participants during the overwhelming process of their *HTLGN* experience. Winnicott’s concept of maternal holding and ‘mirror role of the mother’ (1971) will be employed to further investigate the expert’s key characteristics such as his voice, touch and caring stance towards his makeover subjects. For Winnicott, these elements define the function of the ‘good enough mother’ to give the infant an interpretation of its subjective experiences but also tolerate its frustrations. Winnicott’s ideas on the facilitating role of the mother’s ‘mirror face’ (1971) in the emotional development of infants, to recognise and make sense of its experience, will assist the makeover aim in exploring the role and function of Gok Wan in the setting, but also what is emotionally at stake for the expert himself. Klein’s (1959) central psychoanalytic mechanism of ‘projective identification’ will assist the scrutiny and analysis of Gok Wan’s capacity for empathy towards his subject’s body-issue concerns and troubles.

#### Notes towards a viewing method: Research practices and decisions

In the first two years of doctoral research work it was necessary to gain a deeper scholarly understanding of the development and evolution of the makeover format and British lifestyle media in general. As noted in chapter 1 of my thesis, BBC’s lifestyle media have a long history and tradition of advice media and leisure programming. As I wanted to get acquainted with the history of British lifestyle and advice media, I visited the British Film Institute library (BFI) three to four

times a week. I booked a private viewing room to watch, observe and transcribe television programmes, visual material that predominantly arrived from the BBC archives. I began my primary research by viewing cookery programmes from the 1940s to 1970s. These include Fanny Cradock's colourful cookery series aired by BBC1. The episodes the BFI library retrieved from the BBC archives and I viewed were: *Bon Viveur: Gala Christmas Dinner* (BBC, 1956); *Kitchen Party* (BBC, 1963); *Adventurous Cooking* (BBC, 1966); *Christmas Cooking* (BBC, 1966); *Problem Cooking* (BBC, 1967); *Ten Class Dishes* (BBC, 1968); *Fanny Cradock* (BBC, 1968); *Giving a dinner party* (BBC, 1969); *Fanny Cradock invites ...* (BBC, 1970); *Fanny Cradock cooks for Christmas* (BBC, 1975). Apart from Fanny Cradock's cookery programme, I also viewed Phillip Harpens's BBC television series called *Grammar of Cookery* (BBC, 1946-1951). The programme was just 10 minutes long and the BFI could retrieve only one episode: *Fish and Chips* (BBC, 1946). In my note-taking process, I began by predominantly transcribing the experts' narratives and made descriptive and reflective commentary on the format arrangements. This allowed me to understand the cultural development and transition of the position of the expert in British lifestyle media from very authoritative towards a more friendly and approachable figure.

Additional programmes that I transcribed at the BFI library were television series that focused on women's fashion, thus offering instructions on the art of making garments. From the *Knitting Fashion* series which I briefly mentioned in chapter 1, I watched two episodes (from the BBC archives) entitled *Design for yourself* (BBC2, 1976) and *Setting the Style* (BBC2, 1976). When viewing *Knitting Fashion*, I came across the *Clothes that Count* (BBC1, 1967) series episodes,

*Shirt Waister* (BBC1, 1967), *The Suit* (BBC1, 1967), *A Double-Breasted coat* (BBC1, 1967). Unlike *Knitting Fashion* that was presented by Pam Dawson, *Clothes that Count* involved the advice and instructions around fashion and garment-making by male tailors. This posited an interesting development in the divided role and position between the male and female experts on different formats giving instructions and advice on themes around garment design and tailoring women's fashion clothing. These research viewings and transcriptions offered me a cultural backdrop for the development of lifestyle TV media. Moreover, it offered me an insight into the cultural development of the fashion/stylist into the female participant's 'gay best friend' and/or Fairy Gok-mother who in the *HTLGN* makeover frame facilitates an emotional transformational process by remodifying the garment on the female participant's body, as my chapter 4 case study reveals.

As I moved towards the development of British makeover format where the transformation of the self is a central concern, my primary research revealed the importance of *Changing Rooms* in shaping the evolution of makeover television. In particular, it highlighted the significance of objects and the quest for them in relation to emotional experience, and this became central to my research questions. For one month recurrently, I watched in total 90 episodes of the complete series of *Changing Rooms*<sup>8</sup>. My viewing method, consisted of taking notes on the interesting developments in each episode. I visited the BFI on a daily basis to view episodes and to ensure that I was able to work through complete

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<sup>8</sup> During my viewing process of the *Changing Rooms* series, I also watched season 1 and 2 of the garden makeover series *Ground Force* which shortly after I discontinued since the format's concept and narratives were unrelated to the focus of my work.



seasons. This allowed time for transcribing and re-watching key moments that revealed a shift in the format itself. This was especially apparent in the interaction between experts and participants and in that between the designers and the presenter. Episodes that signalled certain shifts were repeatedly (re)played numerous times on the BFI's viewing console table, and paused in certain instances to capture the screen shot and produce descriptive and reflective commentary of what I was watching. Many times, one episode, each 30 mins long, would translate into five hours of note-taking. Because of the wealth of material and viewing practice, I produced 300 pages of viewing notes, where I was able to transfer them in the writing process of my research work and reflect on them through a psychoanalytic observation stance. What became apparent was a cultural development that depicted the evolution and transformation of the makeover format which chimes with the concept and manifestation of the 'therapeutic culture', as discussed in Chapter 2.

My close observation of the format of *Changing Rooms* as well as my descriptive and reflective commentary on its narratives allowed me to identify key themes. This began with the couch and its role as an object with psychoanalytic significance and this prompted me to identify the broader use of objects in this show. Moreover, it signalled the evolution and reconfiguration of the role of the style expert in the popular British makeover frame. This development became apparent in the extensive research of the popular makeover series *What Not To Wear* where after watching and transcribing viewing materials from series 1 to 4, I distinguished the exact moment/episodes where psychoanalytic props and practices were employed in the format. This signalled a significant shift in the

role the fashion/stylist expert and the format. These viewing method and research practices enabled me to identify a corpus of material for in-depth analysis in the case study phase of my work.

### *How to Look Good Naked: Episode selection and textual analysis*

*HTLGN* produced four series with a total of fifty-five episodes. After the completion of its fourth series, Gok Wan produced a makeover special under the title *How To Look Good Naked with a Difference*, which involved improving the body confidence and self-esteem of three ordinary women living with disability. However, my thesis focuses on the analysis of the first four series and does not intend to offer any literature or analytical backdrop on the discourse around makeover television and body-image struggles and concerns of ordinary people with disabilities.

Through a set of screenshot examples and narratives taken from the makeover series *HTLGN*, my thesis aims to demonstrate the value of an object relations psychoanalytic approach to the analysis of the makeover's procedural process where emotional processes and psychological investments dominate the space. The descriptive passages of *HTLGN* that I present and explore psychoanalytically as part of my case study analysis come from my own close viewing notes taken during the extensive viewing of the series.

In particularly, I have selected screenshots from episodes presented in the second, third and fourth makeover series. The reason for this is the change in format from

series one to two. Being an originally produced programme, series one included a pilot episode, and all the episodes ran for 23 minutes. Series one remained under development, since there was not a concrete and established makeover setting with a line of procedures sustained throughout each and every episode. Even though elements of what constitutes today an essential part of the makeover experience, such as the self-reflective use of makeover mirrors (Chapters 2 and 4) and the ‘photoshoot challenge’ (Chapter 5), began to emerge from series one, it was series two that established in such dynamic form the *HTLGN* procedural method and the role of Gok Wan in the setting. From series two onwards, *HTLGN* extended its running time to 48 minutes and the process was firmly established and sustained by Gok Wan, whose presence became more solid and profound in the process and the setting. It is important to signpost that the *HTLGN* series two, three and four were broadcasted by Channel 4 in 2007 and 2008 and, as Chapter 2 explains, this time period is culturally significant as it parallels the rise of therapy culture and also crystallises the significance of therapeutic discourse in the makeover framework.

Throughout my viewing of the series I investigate the makeover moments where the makeover setting and on-screen relationship, and interaction between expert-participant, give rise to rich opportunities where emotions dominate the space. These emotionally rich makeover moments, which I intend to accentuate, have been assembled through screenshots in the thesis so as to document them in a form that reveals the processes and emotions that are at play. In order to emphasise certain makeover reactions from the side of both the makeover expert and of the subject, I have added descriptive commentary that will give life to the

image depictions. Here, it is important to remark that for the psycho-cultural development of this thesis it was needed to refine the material that could be presented due to restrictions of space.

*HTLGN* series episodes were freely available on the Channel4's website. I watched every single episode of the programme and followed the same viewing process and pattern outlined for the *Changing Rooms* format. The *HTLGN* viewing method stretched and continued throughout my doctoral work. Episodes were re-watched, transcribed numerous times in order to be refined and thus provide strong cases for psychoanalytic reading and analysis that would meet my research objectives. Therefore, by transcribing and adding psychoanalytic commentary during the viewing process of the series, I collected 470 pages worth of observational material which allowed me to identify and address significant moments that constituted important themes and elements of my analysis.

Therefore, the selected *HTLGN* episode scenes that I discuss within this project represent the most pronounced examples of material relevant to my research objectives. Each episode identified in chapters 4 and 5 makes specific use of objects that might be described as having an emotional and psychological significance for the female participants. In this way, I was able to delimit the corpus of material for analysis.

The wealth of material produced by my analysis of the texts themselves meant difficult decisions had to be made around my original intention to explore audience response as part of the thesis. In the early stages of my research work, I

intended to collect and analyse audience responses as depicted in cyber space and public discussion forums that were freely available on-line. However, after careful consideration and discussion with my supervisory team and due to the development of my thesis towards the emotional significance and impact of object use in the makeover frame, it was decided to put aside any material on audience responses on the *HTLGN* makeover series and focus this project solely on the application of psychoanalysis to the textual and narrative aspects of the makeover. However, the collected materials on audience responses that were gathered in the initial stages of my research work will be incorporated into the expansion of my psycho-cultural project in the post-doctoral phase of my research.

Here, my role as an observer in response to the case study analysis of the makeover material requires a further reflection. Having completed postgraduate study and training in psychoanalytic studies at the Tavistock Clinic, I have extensively developed my knowledge and understanding of psychoanalysis and theories, with a particular focus on the British object relations psychoanalytic tradition. As part of the Tavistock method, I completed a two-and-a-half-year intensive training in infant observation, which consisted of the observations of an infant and its mother in a natural setting, usually the home, conducted on a regular basis, for an hour each week for the first two years of an infant's life.

As part of this training, I developed my observation skills and wrote countless reflective reports on the forming relationship and the facilitating that was forming between mother and infant. My training was more engaged in making sense of the infant and mother's emotional experience, and the emotional and psychological processes that were at play, as well as the emotional bonds that

were evolving through these emotional experiences. The reports had to be very descriptive and detailed, attending closely to the fine detail of the infant's appearance in any movements. I have made use of psychoanalytic observation as a technique, and the method that I learned through my Tavistock training, in my careful and detailed psychoanalytic reading of the series.

This context of my experience of infant observations at the Tavistock informed my decision to make use of screenshots in my analysis of the show as a means of reflecting the importance of observational approach. The close analysis of the makeover textual frame and the relationship between the expert and the female participant worked together with my identification of the role of objects in the format. This allowed me to identify and bring to the surface the emotional and unconscious processes that become manifest in the makeover format, accentuating the importance of my use of object relations psychoanalysis. My use of this close observational technique introduces a new model for the analysis of popular media texts.

## CHAPTER 2

### The role of the ‘couch’ in Makeover TV

Makeover culture promises ordinary people a journey of self-transformation with hope of attaining happiness, success and well-being. It is this promise of an emotional self-reinvention that allows me to begin this chapter by situating the makeover discourse firmly as an integral part of contemporary therapy culture. Therapy culture is a current popular phenomenon of contemporary western culture and is recognised by an endless cultural fascination with searching for personal meanings, a constant exploration of emotional experiences and a continuous engagement in working on and emotionally refining the self in a quest to attain emotional well-being.

Frank Furedi (2004:22) claims that ‘therapy culture is often characterised as a retreat to the inner world of the self’ and maintained by placing continuous emphasis on the expression and management of feelings and/or emotional states. Following Rieff’s (1966) *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, an ‘affective turn’ has been recognised by academic scholars that signals a cultural fascination with the psychologisation and emotionalisation of everyday life (Richards & Brown, 2011) and an emerging therapeutic culture (Rose, 1990; Furedi, 2004; Phillips, 1995; Richards, 2007; Richards and Brown, 2002).

Uniquely cast in late modernity, Richards and Brown (2002:107) argue that this ‘affective turn’ signals a preoccupation with the notion of ‘therapeutic potential’, as a means of ‘engaging with and seeking to manage emotional life’. In support of their hypothesis, they claim that ‘the terms “therapeutic” and “manage” are used ... in a neutral way, implying neither unproblematic ideals of cure and autonomy, nor sinister projects of governance and control’(ibid).

The rise of therapy culture in the western world signals a cultural preoccupation with emotions and therapeutic notions of the self in all areas of public life. In western popular media and societies, there is a continuous striving to understand ourselves, to find the hidden meanings behind our emotions and behaviours and to discover quick and easy ways to deal with the uncertainties of everyday life. This therapeutic turn within the UK media landscape is present in the increased focus upon the scrutiny of the self, where identity is often understood and defined in relation to our emotional experiences as well as in the relationships we form with ourselves and others. Academics have argued that the appearance of therapy culture has emerged in a time frame where a blurring of boundaries between public and private spheres has become apparent, because of the loosening of traditional boundaries between public and private experiences (Furedi, 2004; Lasch, 1979). The ‘emotionalisation of public sphere’ (Richards, 2007) has become an emblematic feature of modern life. Barry Richards (2007) recognised that the British public’s emotional outbursts and reactions to the death of Princess Diana in 1997 were an illustrative case of this ‘emotionalisation’, the growth of the phenomenon of what Furedi (2004) pessimistically characterises as ‘therapy



culture'. Richards and Brown (2002) classify this, with a subtle difference, as a 'therapeutic culture'.

Richards (2007) and Furedi (2004) have opposing views of what the notion of 'therapy culture' consists of and how it should be understood. Barry Richards offers a more positive reading of therapy culture, emphasising the potential for emotional literacy, empathy, containment and capacity for living with uncertainty that is offered by 'therapeutic culture'. Negative readings offered by Furedi (and Lasch) focus on problems related to emotional governance, and the conservative 'psychologisation' of the socio-political.

The notion of the 'therapeutic' as positively described by Richards (2007) is central for the psycho-cultural development of this thesis in addressing the ways in which Gok Wan's method and *HTLGN* practises facilities for its subjects (and by extension the viewers) with a cultural opportunity to negotiate aspects of their inner self-experiences.

The emergence of the therapeutic discourse, over the last decade, has led to a rapid growth in academic interest around the concept of happiness and subjective well-being, especially in relation to policy developments by western governments. As Furedi explains (2004:22), a culture becomes therapeutic 'when the form of thinking expands from informing the relationship between the individual and therapist to shaping public perceptions about a variety of issues'.

In the popular media format, Brown and Richards comment that:

to refer to a culture as therapeutic is to suggest that the social scripts, lenses and vocabularies through which people understand themselves and their lives are strongly inflected by the interior-oriented language of the therapeutic (with talk about feelings, attachments, self-esteem, anxiety, stress, well-being, security, trauma, loss, mourning, and so on).

(Brown and Richards, 2011:19)

Richards has recognised the mediated rise of what he calls ‘therapeutic culture’ through his study of ‘schedules and ratings’ (2007:31), and he recognises that the popularity of soap operas and reality TV programmes is highly suggestive of this cultural trend towards emotional expressivity. Yates (2013) signals that this therapeutic growth within reality television is evident through various popular reality formats, from the *Big Brother* UK franchise (Channel 4, 2000-2010; Channel 5, 2011- ) to talent shows such as the *The X Factor* (ITV, 2004-), in which ‘the emotional journeys of the protagonists signal the therapeutic potential of such shows, courting the attention of viewers who identify with the personal ups and downs of their life histories’ (Yates, 2013:5). The confessional style of various documentary formats and so-called “tabloid talk shows” such as *Jerry Springer* (1991-) or *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (2005-), or self-help family programmes such as *Supernanny* (2004-2011)<sup>9</sup> or *Honey We’re Killing The Kids* (2005-2007), provides an example of the expansion of the therapeutic ethos on television and elsewhere today.

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<sup>9</sup> The psycho-cultural model that I am working towards has already addressed television in this area with a reference to psychoanalytic ideas. Examples of this are the work offered by Galit Ferguson (2010) and Tracey Jensen (2011).

In this chapter, I will map out the view that the emergence of reality television programmes parallels the rise of therapy culture within the UK context, and I will discuss the ways in which such programmes echo the broader cultural fascination with emotional experience. More particularly, I will examine the role of the ‘couch’ in reality makeover television programmes such as *Changing Rooms* (hereafter *CR*), *What Not to Wear* (hereafter *WNTW*) and *HTLGN* in order to argue that it crystallises the significance of therapeutic discourse. This chapter will further discuss the way in which such discourse affects the emergence of a range of different characteristics seen in these reality makeover programmes.

Debates around therapy/therapeutic culture are rather polarised, with various academics discussing the value or otherwise of this cultural trend, especially in connection with the media context. These debates focus on how this therapeutic tendency has affected social behaviours, government policies and cultural artefacts, and this chapter draws on these debates to explore aspects of reality makeover television.

The following section will begin to interrogate theoretical debates and critiques around therapy culture and will signal how these feed into the general frame of the makeover.

### **Critiques of therapy culture**

In the UK, critiques of therapy culture have become aligned with the ‘dumbing down’ of society (Yates, 2011:62), since emotional ‘well-being’ has been prioritised as personal responsibility and part of the individual agenda and has become more important than academic standards and educational achievements (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008). For the sociologist Furedi (2004:25), ‘therapy culture’ cultivates emotional passivity and fragility while at the same time promoting the idea that ‘we all need help’ (Cummings, 2003) and that we are ‘in need of a constant evaluation of our internal life and behaviour [while at the same time] overlooking the social and cultural foundation of individual’. Furedi argues that the constant emotional preoccupation with oneself overlooks the social and cultural foundations of individual identity, thus creating the profile of an ‘asocial self’ (Rice, 1996:89-99).

In an analogous pessimistic vein, Christopher Lasch (1979) frames the development of therapy culture, or what he calls ‘therapeutic sensibility’, in negative terms. Lasch’s negative view of therapy culture is exemplified by a constant self-preoccupation, a relentless self-examination and an encouragement of ‘anxious self-scrutiny’ (1979:48), all of which have led to the development of more narcissistic personalities. He argues that, due to western consumerist society, structures have been shaken and family units have become fragmented. People have lost the capacity to form human attachments and have isolated themselves from emotionally investing in meaningful object relations, and this has led individuals to become more anxious, self-involved, narcissistic and overly preoccupied with superficial appearance and the performance of the self.

Lasch's argument manifests itself in response to the neoliberal project of the self-improvements format. Over the last decade there has been an increase in the number of popular makeover television programmes with personal stories that reveal such popular preoccupations with superficial appearance and beauty. These include makeover programmes such as *Extreme Makeover*, *10 Years Younger*, *Dr 90210* (E!, 2004 -2008), *The Swan* (Fox, 2004), and *Extreme Weight Loss* (ABC, 2011-). These makeover shows focus on stories of individuals who are overly anxious and discontented with their physical appearance and therefore eager to undergo extreme surgical interventions in the hope of attaining a 'perfect' version of themselves and achieving happiness.

Building on Lasch's argument, British psychologist Oliver James, author of the book *Affluenza* (2007), explicitly locates personal unhappiness and the fragility of the self in the neoliberal roots of 'selfish capitalism' that has prevailed since the 1980s. James (2007) argues that the increasing emphasis on acquiring money and the possession of material goods, and the constant effort to meet the capitalistic standards of a neoliberal economy, has led to an increase in egotistic 'me' attitudes and greedy behaviours. Such attitudes have led towards the development of a more vulnerable sense of self, one that is susceptible to emotional distresses such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse and personality disorder.

In response to a flaky sense of self, therapy culture recognises the self as having an 'emotional deficit' and promotes a structure of 'emotional correctness' (Furedi, 2004), which works as a form of 'social control' (2004:93), since political and

social problems are individualised and reduced down to personal unhappiness. In a neoliberal economy, where financial success becomes an individual responsibility and personal achievement indicative of self-worth, at 'risk' individuals who suffer social and economic losses are often labelled as being a 'loser', and the notion of therapy is 'advocated as a way to get people back to work' (Yates, 2011:63).

This notion of therapy was first promoted in 2008, when the then Health Secretary Alan Johnson cited the significance of 'improving access to psychological therapies' through GP surgeries, and he announced a major programme to train 3,600 new psychological therapists with a budget of £170m (BBC News, 2007). His UK 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' programme was designed to give people with depression and anxiety disorders, from mild to severe forms of these conditions, access to cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) through GP surgeries (Anderson et al., 2009). The increased awareness of mental illness and its increased visibility has meant less stigma and more accessible treatment (Kenny, 2003). However, the kind of therapy that Johnson was advocating was not long term-psychotherapy, but rather short-term option of CBT, a remedy to get depressed people back to work. Yates argues that the promotion of therapy culture and the availability of the 'quick-fix' (Yates, 2011) forms of therapy tend only to cure the symptoms and to focus on positive feelings in the hope of attaining happiness.

Our contemporary popular media culture is awash with examples of personal testimony and the drive to work continuously on the inner sense of self in order to

achieve happiness and well-being. In the 'era of [neoliberal] availability' one can engage in the consumption of various therapeutic channels through self-help books, 'issue-oriented' talk shows and reality makeover programmes, where popular media manifestations of 'therapy culture' promise to save the fragile and fragmented self from its vulnerabilities and messy emotional states, by offering neoliberal consumers/citizens a 'self-regulating' gateway into achieving happiness and emotional well-being.

This contemporary mediated view of therapy culture involves the celebration of positive emotional states and the avoidance of negative and/or messy emotions that tend to disrupt oneself from achieving self-fulfilment. Yates (2011:69) links the concept of therapy culture with the notion of 'well-being' and happiness, which is suggestive, she claims, of the avoidance of disappointment. We distance ourselves from the messiness and uncertainties of everyday life and this constitutes the promotion of what Yates describes as 'charismatic therapy' in popular media.

Yates employs the notion of 'charisma' here to 'connote the application of therapy in the post-Freudian era, where the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain are pursued through the consumption of short-term therapies and promoted by charismatic therapists as a quick route to emotional well-being'. However, she reminds us that this contemporary view of 'therapeutic' does not reflect the classical Freudian mindset of therapy, which considers the uncertainties and messiness of life as essential aspects for the management of the self, and disappointment as an important dynamic of self-growth and self-preservation. Yates (2011:69) argues then that idea of 'emotional well-being' fits well with

notions of charisma, since the term ‘emotional well-being’ is often used interchangeably with notions of happiness and ‘emotional intelligence’. This view was widely distributed, as Yates signals, through the work of the UK New Labour government’s ‘happiness tsar’ Richard Layard (2006), whose work has proved influential for former UK Prime Minister David Cameron, who set up ‘the “Happiness Index” as means of measuring people’s happiness’.

In the UK alone the ‘happiness industry’, according to Barbara Gunnel, has been a highly profitable movement that has generated roughly £80 million a year through sales of self-help books (Gunnel, 2008). What clearly becomes apparent here is that these notions of therapy culture, happiness and emotional well-being neatly fit the ‘charismatic’ concept of ‘feeling good’, a concept that has a price-tag attached into it and clearly fits the neoliberal economic project of selfish capitalism. Self-improvement therapy practices are also introduced and promoted in the makeover frame and now became available through consumption, which one could argue constitutes a neoliberal reflective model to keep the economic stakes of capitalism growing, while at the same time sustaining the view that self-fulfilment and achieving ‘emotional well-being’ is an individual responsibility. As a result, we witness a remodelling of pampering, consumption and practices that centre on looking good as therapy-based methods. Therefore, self-grooming practices such as shopping [retail] therapy, aromatherapy and beauty therapy have transformed into ‘quick fix’ techniques that promise to make you feel better and offer quick routes to happiness and enhance self-esteem.



In the following section, I foreground the view that the emergence of reality makeover television programmes parallels the growth of therapy culture. To do that, I chart the specific role of the couch within reality makeover discourse, arguing that it crystallises the significance of therapeutic discourse and affects the emergence of a range of different characteristics in the programmes themselves. This discussion is pertinent for the establishment of the *HTLGN* as an emblematic feature of what Richards positively coins ‘therapeutic culture’.<sup>10</sup>

### **The use of the couch in the Makeover format**

Within the makeover television context, my research shows that the couch has transitioned from being an object to become a symbolic representation that signifies the notion of therapy itself. Before tracing this transition within the makeover context, it is important to remind ourselves of the position of the couch within the media context. The couch is a familiar TV prop and its significance changes according to cultural values. For instance, looking back at the famous term ‘couch potato’, one can observe that it has been used within media discourse to popularise the negative effect of television on citizens, but also to emphasise the laziness and passivity of television viewers lying on the couch in front of the television, suggesting that they are un-critically spoon-fed everything that television has to offer.

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<sup>10</sup> Barry Richards distinguishes between ‘therapy culture’ with the negative associations (Furedi, 2004; Lasch, 1979) and ‘therapeutic culture’, which connotes more positive associations (Richards, 2007; 2000).

Also, the ‘talk show couch’ brought us a new dimension of therapeutic discourse via Oprah Winfrey, where ordinary people, and presumably their personal stories, were brought onto the television set to create a space for emotional experience. In my analysis, I will further explore the concept of emotional experience within the makeover context, primarily through the application of object relations psychoanalysis. It is therefore important to question and explore the transition of the meaning of the couch, which has taken place in recent years, and the role of reality format programming in allowing this to happen. In order to explore this further, I have researched extensively three programmes: The British game show/home improvement makeover series *CR*, and the self-modification makeover programmes *WNTW* and *HTLGN*. The analysis that follows helps to foreground the increasingly therapeutic emphasis of this sub-genre of reality television and its condensing into the couch as a symbol.

#### *Changing Rooms: Dreams on the Couch*

*CR* brought the expansion of reality makeover TV into a full-length format and was a key player in its move into primetime schedules. Typically, *CR* contained the story of two sets of neighbours who transform each other’s living space according to a design brief, budget and time-frame provided by the programme with the help of one interior designer/decorator for each team. The presenter takes the audience through the two-day renovation process towards the final reveal, with both couples seeing their rooms and meeting up again, hopefully still on friendly terms. The show included some top designers, whose ideas could be a little over the top, which led to a few tears and tantrums.

In this series, the couch materialised as an important object in need of modernisation, while the series also stressed its prominence as a key element of the family unit. I have charted the first symbolic appearance of the ‘couch’ in *CR*’s opening scene of the first episode in 1996 (Series 1, Episode 1), where the host/presenter of the programme, Carol Smilie, introduces the designer Linda Barker, to viewers. During the voiceover introduction Barker is seated on the floor investigating very carefully a tired looking couch that is ripped in many areas. She examines the couch carefully, as if it is in the hands of a consultant contemplating how it could potentially be repaired. It is my view that there is a symbolic reading to be made here and ‘associations’ that one could make with regard to the presence of the object-couch within the mediated makeover space and our culture today.

Here it is important to remind ourselves that the ‘couch’ is a key symbol of psychoanalysis and to be ‘on the couch’ has become a universal shorthand for psychoanalytic and psychotherapy treatment. The couch acts as a symbol for the work and ideas of Sigmund Freud. It is on the couch where Freud’s patients lie to reveal their dreams and memories, narratives that would later inform Freud’s theories of the unconscious. Freud called the couch an ‘ottoman’, or at other times, his examination bed, but it is referred to now as ‘the analytical couch’ (Warner, 2011:149). Therefore, the figure of the tired-looking couch potentially signifies the stereotypical view in the culture of psychoanalysis, as a theory and form of therapy that is old, tired and probably dated, no longer useful and with almost no place in our culture today.

What is also noteworthy in the *CR* scene is that, instead of a therapist, a designer/expert symbolically facilitates the role in acknowledging the value of the ‘couch’, while at the same time opening up new spaces of dialogue for its significance and belonging within the contemporary media landscape and contemporary culture. The view of the designer indicating the importance of the ‘couch’ within the makeover discourse can be seen as a milestone for the later reconfiguration of the expert embracing the role of the therapist, and as a display of the symbolic turn of makeover programming towards the therapeutic discourse, an illustration of the televisualisation of therapy culture.

In a later episode of *CR* (Series 1, Episode 3), the couch is found to have transitioned within the makeover space, one that marks the crystallisation of therapy culture within the reality makeover discourse. During the second day of the two-day renovation process, and as part of the makeover procedure, each team reflects on the progress they have already made on the room renovation. The format of the scene consists of a wide shot of the couple seated ‘on the couch’. Contrasting the earlier appearance of the tired looking couch inside the room/space under renovation, the object-couch has been made over by the designer and has transitioned from the inner space of the room under renovation to the outer space of the house, the back garden. Now using the house as a backdrop of the screen shot, the camera zooms in on the couple, who are seated on the couch. The team offers a reflective account of their first day working with the designer, whilst at the same time they reflect on their emotions and thoughts with regard to the renovation process of the room. Moreover, they comment on their anxieties and worries in regard to the final stages of the renovation process:

**Carol (presenter's voiceover):** After the first day, how did they sleep?

**Team member:** I had a bit of an alarming dream, that the room was not ready and all the colours were wrong.

The same format is sustained with the opposite team, who are asked the same (voiceover) question by the presenter. However, this time the couch is placed outside the front door of the house and on the street. Seated on the couch, the team reflects as follows:

**Team member:** We were exhausted last night but still had a nightmare of how the room would look.

Both these scenes evoke a psychoanalytic discourse suggestive of a technique and an approach used in therapy, which becomes apparent through the depiction of each team seated 'on the couch' reflecting on their dream experiences during the *CR* renovation process. More particularly, it is through the interpretation of (their) dreams that both teams communicate their fears, anxieties and uncertainties to the camera/therapist and to the presenter as an extension of the lens. Also, bringing the couch into the open is indicative of the emergence of the therapy frame and its democratisation, i.e. bringing the couch 'out' onto the street.

The scene thus becomes a therapeutic sketch that embodies the classical psychoanalytic notion of the setting due to the presence of the couch and the narration of dreams. What is also noteworthy about these two particular scenes is that the 'couch' has transitioned from the inner to the outer space. More particularly, the inner space of the room, where the couch is first depicted, becomes suggestive of the domestic and private. The couch as a symbol is connotative of the inner self and the exploration of the unconscious, a reflective work that resides in the private space of a consulting room. Therefore, the symbolic transition of the couch from a private space of within towards a public outer space is connotative of the bearing out of the inner emotional experience. Such symbolic transition, indicative of the blurring of boundaries between the private and public sphere, is directly connected to confessional culture and suggestive of the 'powerful affirmation of emotionalism' (Furedi, 2004:17), highlighting the parallels between makeover TV and the cultural turn towards therapeutic discourse.

Once the symbolic transition of the couch within the *CR* frame was established, an additional shift took place, this time in relation to the position of the host and the designer and the work that they employ in the setting. The shift informs the beginning of a process that leads towards the later reconfiguration of the makeover expert who embraces a role stereotypically associated with that of a therapist.

Since *CR*'s first episode, the role and position of the host was visibly segregated from that of the interior designers/decorators. Carol Smilie's role as a host is very distinctive: Carol is required to interview both professionals and lay participants

and to assist with the work when required. Her role is more than that of an interviewer. Carol discursively sets the tone for the show, attempting to keep the atmosphere light and humorous even if the resultant ‘changed rooms’ are seen to be unsatisfactory. Carol is required to be a discursive jack-of-all-trades and effectively acts as a bridge between programme participants and the programme and its audiences. Carol assists but does not direct the decoration.

However, in my extensive viewings of the programme, I witnessed a significant change in the makeover frame of the programme. In 2003, *CR* entered its fourteenth season, which saw the departure of Carol Smilie and the advancement of interior designer Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen to host of the programme. His former position in the programme was purely part of the interior designers’ team. What becomes apparent here is a merging of roles between that of the host and designer. In this way, the popular makeover discourse reconfigures the notion of the expert, who offers his advice to his subjects and also communicates his message and ideas to the viewers and offers them advice too.

The flamboyant, leather-clad and totally over the top Llewelyn-Bowen, now in the role of the host, guides the audiences through the rooms under renovation as he comments on the decoration choices and reflects on the taste of the owners, offering his personal tips and touches. As discussed earlier, this is a form of designing intervention that Carol Smilie was not qualified to employ.

The role of the host/designer expert in the *CR*’s setting begins to evolve. Llewelyn-Bowen now looks directly into the camera and talks in the first person, giving

interior design information directly to the audience. Now he offers his judgment on the decorative choices and changes in the rooms and communicates what needs to be done as well as which areas need attention by the interior designer's team. For instance, he makes his stylistic and interior diagnosis on the bedroom of a girl who is now in her late teens. Llewelyn-Bowen states 'the room needs to grow up as the girl who lives in it has already done'. Visiting the other team's room, he reflects on the owners' emotions and mood and offers his own stylistic analysis, suggesting to the viewer the emotional reason for their wish to renovate, stating: 'the owner must have felt intimidated by it' (*CR*: Season 14, Episode 1).

An additional significant change that is worth commenting on, and that marks a further shift in the role of the makeover expert, is the fact that Llewelyn-Bowen now exchanges ideas with the show's participants and thus invites them (as ordinary people) to judge and/or challenge the designers' taste. This is a surprising development in the interaction between designer/expert and the participants, as it instigates a level of communication and exchange of dialogue between them. The freedom to question the designers' taste, knowledge and perception was never made available at the beginning of the series, since the designers' acquired knowledge was not allowed to be doubted and/or questioned. For instance, in the very same episode, the team was in doubt about the designer's taste due to his decoration choices for the room under renovation. Llewelyn-Bowen walks towards the doorstep of the house, where the team is seated contemplating the designer's taste and the makeover plan, and says: 'you are here as guardians and if you do not like it surely you should say something and change it'. Here, attention is also focused on the ordinary people's feelings, emotional reactions and capacity for



reflection, whereas beforehand, the focus was solely embedded on the designer's decision. Such a claim becomes evident in the following example from *CR* where, in the moment of the reveal of one of the two rooms, one member of the team reacts in a very enthusiastic manner by cheering and smiling, whereas the other does not show an emotional reaction to the makeover reveal moment. Due to that absence of emotion, Llewelyn-Bowen comments: 'I have not seen a raw emotion from you.'

This event arguably marks a moment in the makeover game show when the role of emotion starts to play a more prominent role within the process, even more than aspects of taste and design. My work argues that this shift is central to understanding the idiosyncratic role of Gok Wan in the makeover series *HTLGN*, where he offers his own consultation on how the clothes he has selected make the person look and feel, as well as the way in which his female subjects react and express their emotions in response to his stylistic choices and the challenges that he sets for them. My analysis sets out to explore, through a psychoanalytic inflection, the role and importance of emotions in the makeover space and the emotional investments that are at play between the makeover subjects and the expert.

Therefore, I have argued that the makeover show's depiction of the couch crystallises the emergence of therapeutic culture within the reality television genre and signals the beginning of the later reconfiguration of the role of the host/expert in that of a therapist. This, in turn, consolidates the visibility of the therapeutic turn, embedding it solidly in the popular cultural moment. As I will show, this

marks a key turning point in the development of the makeover format, influencing the increasing focus on emotional dynamics, as I discuss in the next section below.

#### In ‘private consultation’ with *What Not to Wear*

The emergence of therapy culture has been symbolised by the appearance of a number of different characteristics, especially within makeover television. I have located a key set of moments that signal a turn towards the therapeutic discourse within the makeover programme *WNTW*. *WNTW* aired in 2001 and was the first full-length self-modification makeover show in Britain, presented by fashion stylists Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine. In 2004, the format of the show took a distinctively therapeutic turn towards emotionalised content when it placed a particular emphasis on the symbolic representation of the ‘couch’ as an important tool for the scrutiny of the self and the makeover process. The appearance of the couch on the set of the programme lent it a therapeutic quality and, in a way, this replaced its initial focus on class-inflected modes of guidance on issues of style, taste and social distinction (McRobbie, 2009)<sup>11</sup>.

During the run of Series 4, the makeover series *WNTW* aired Episode 3, titled ‘Women with Teenage Daughters’. According to the makeover format, Trinny and Susannah chose the five mothers from hundreds of video applicants who dressed

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<sup>11</sup> In her book chapter “‘What Not to Wear’ and Post-feminist symbolic violence’ Angela McRobbie (2009) draws upon the *WNTW* format to analyse women’s impact on modern power relations in the media through shaping one’s bodily discourse. McRobbie has used Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital to focus on practices of symbolic violence and forms of domination. As McRobbie (2009:139) writes, ‘Bourdieu’s writing allows us to re-cast symbolic violence as a vehicle of social reproduction. The victims of the make-over television programme presents her class habitus for analysis and critiques by the experts ... The programmes comprise a series of encounters where ... cultural intermediaries, impact guidance and advice to individuals, ostensibly as a means of self-improvement.’

the most inappropriately for their age, in order to teach them ‘what not to wear’. As the episode reveals, the makeover request had been made by the daughters, who sent a video and voted for their mothers to be selected by the programme’s stylists for a makeover. During their video recordings, some of the daughters expressed feelings of embarrassment and shame about their mothers’ age inappropriate choice of attire. The *WNTW* presenters are now asked to restore the messy mother-daughter relationship by teaching the women ‘what not to wear’. After narrowing the field down to five makeover finalists, the presenters must select the two women who are most in need of a makeover. For the selection process, Trinny and Susannah take each woman for a ‘private consultation’, a term used for the first time by the presenters on their makeover programme. It is important to underline that the term ‘private consultation’ conjures up images of the encounter and sets the profile of the programme to a more therapeutic tone. Prior to the consultation, there is a panoramic scene where the presenters Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine are lying ‘on the couch’ looking up to the panoramic lens and narrating in turn to the camera:

To really go under the skin of these mothers we need to go head to head; one-to-one to scrutinise each one of them and see what makes them tick.

Therefore, they begin the consultation by posing questions to women about their choice of clothes, why they want to take part in the makeover and how it will change their lives. During the consultation, the mother lies on the ‘couch’ facing the fashion ‘therapist’, who sits in an armchair opposite her, which in some respect

replicates the face-to-face situation that is used to describe the seating arrangement in psychotherapy, as opposed to psychoanalysis where the patient is usually on the couch facing away from the psychoanalyst (Freud, 1904; Green, 1999; Weissman, 1977). The presenter, in the role of the therapist, is holding pen and paper listening to the contestant/patient. In the background, one can observe a mannequin wearing a colourful outfit with accessories, which gives emphasis to the fact that the consultation is centred on the notion of fashion and taste.

The narratives and the format of the programme clearly suggest that a number of therapeutic elements come to the surface in this show; together with the deployment of language codified by emotion and narrative techniques inflected by this, they demonstrate how therapy culture begins to emerge in this kind of televised show. The couch appears as an essential aspect/object in this programme, conjuring up popular images of the encounter with a therapist in the consulting room. In the makeover context, the couch transitions into an important tool that will help the presenters/stylists to scrutinise the female participants' emotions and personality in order to understand their hidden emotional intentions behind their obscure taste in clothes and sense of style. Here, it is worth noting that the appearance of the couch in the 'private consultation' of *WNTW* occurred a year after Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen took up the principal role of the host/expert in *CR*'s format. This is significant timewise, since it signals an ongoing evolution of the role of the expert in line with the emergence of therapy culture. In the next section, I will open up the discussion that situates the emergence of fashion/stylist Gok Wan, who in the makeover frame of *HTLGN* is seen to employ popular characteristics stereotypically associated with that of a mentor/therapist.

### **The use of mirrors in *How To Look Good Naked***

As we have seen, *HTLGN* also strongly embraces certain characteristics of the therapeutic discourse. *HTLGN* is a reality makeover programme in which the presenter and fashion/stylist, Gok Wan, encourages women who are insecure about their bodies to face their ‘naked’ fears in front of three full-length mirrors and, through the makeover process, to learn and love their bodies, achieve body confidence and embrace their identities. The format of the show centres on self-reflective practices and self-esteem building exercises, where Gok Wan guides the makeover subject as if in the guise of a mentor/therapist, an innovative approach to the makeover process that distinguishes it from *WNTW*, where the experts advise participants without involving them.

*HTLGN* emerged at a time frame when talking about emotional states had become commonplace in the popular media discourse (Richards, 2007; Yates, 2011, 2014). The format of the show and its reflective practices can be viewed as emblematic of a ‘therapeutic’ discourse since they foreground the importance of self-reflection and the articulation of emotional experiences and feelingful states in relation to the body.

What I consider to be of central significance is the relationship of trust that is formed between Gok Wan and the female subject throughout the reflective makeover process, as this is essential for the programme’s therapeutic value and potential, as my case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 will show. My textual analysis of the makeover discourse of *HTLGN* through the methodological application of

object relations psychoanalysis will open up space to explore the emotional investments and unconscious processes that transpire between Gok Wan and the female subjects during the makeover process. This discussion will allow me to consider the programme's therapeutic value and to consider Gok Wan's innovating role in popular (makeover) culture as situating a 'feel good' approach through body confidence.

In this section, I will showcase the initial characteristics of the makeover format, which I will argue gave rise to the therapeutic possibilities of the makeover discourse. In order to support this claim, I will explore the *HTLGN* case of Kelly Chamberlain<sup>12</sup> (Series 3, Episode 15) who was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 30 and underwent eighteen months of treatment, including chemotherapy, which caused hair loss, and surgery to remove her left breast. As Kelly reveals through her makeover narratives, these experiences had a negative impact on her self-confidence and generated an emotional ambivalence towards her body disfigurement that she was unable to overcome.

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<sup>12</sup> Although, in the makeover production of the *WNTW*, the participants undergo a selection process expressing an intent in participating which remains visible to the viewers. In the *HTLGN* makeover case this process remains undocumented and hidden from the audience. If there is a selection procedure (and presumably there is) the first stage for the process involves women from the general public to express an interest of participating by simply submitting an application form. The forms along with the 'Terms and Conditions' on appearing on Gok Wan's program where uploaded on the Channel4's website and are to be submitted in the *HTLGN* production team. Frith, et al. (2010: 474) acknowledge that a *HTLGN* 'participant is chosen for her ordinariness; her body and its imperfections are presented as typical rather than excessive, and her body dissatisfaction is portrayed as usual ... She is presented as "everywoman" ...' The secrecy around production processes contributes to the entrenchment of critiques of neoliberalism that fuel the postfeminist dismissal of this show. Nevertheless, without access to concrete information about these aspects of production, it is impossible to speculate on how editorial discussions are made and finalised and it is therefore impossible to comment further on this in this context.

Kelly arrives in the makeover space of *HTLGN*, a white empty studio space, where Gok Wan welcomes her in a ‘friendly’ manner. The studio is where the makeover process will begin and this is evident by the inclusion of three full-length mirrors on set (Figure 1), which symbolically form a reflective room. The mirrors are located in such a manner that will enable the makeover subject, in this case Kelly, to enter into a space that enables a 360-degree reflective view of her own body.



*Figure 1: Kelly enters the mirror room*

The appearance of the full-length mirrors in the makeover space, ‘symbolically’ forming a close reflective space, was a trope that was first introduced in the makeover format of *WNTW*. However, there are distinctive differences in the symbolic use of the mirrors in the procedural settings used by the makeover experts in *WNTW* and *HTLGN*. In the *WNTW* mirror format, the makeover subject is asked by the presenters to put on an outfit that the participant likes and that she thinks most suits her figure. The makeover participant then enters into a 360-degree mirror cabinet, where she is asked to reflect on her chosen outfit (Figure 2). Shortly

after this, the presenters open the door of the mirror cabinet and while standing ‘outside’ the reflective space they begin to blatantly scrutinise the subject’s outfit and her body based on the way the garment clings to her body (Figure 3).

The following *WNTW* screenshots (Series 3, Episode 7) depict this account:



*Figure 2: WNTW mirror room*



*Figure 3: WNTW mirror-room with presenters in the background*



As visibly depicted in the screenshots above, the *WNTW* presenters Trinny and Susannah invite the makeover subject to enter alone into the mirror cabinet and begin her mirror reflection of her outfit. The presenters then open the ‘mirror’ door and, based on the positive remarks the subject communicated about her chosen outfit and how pleased she is with her silhouette, they begin to address her many body ‘flaws’ highlighted by the chosen outfit.

However, in the *HTLGN* format Gok Wan positions himself within the same symbolic mirror room with the female subject, where he remains physically and symbolically throughout the reflective process of the makeover space. The symbolic depiction of the makeover expert choosing to transition from the outer space of the mirror cabinet and enter inwards to the reflective ‘mirror’ space is suggestive of a development of the makeover expert.

First, this transition is suggestive of Gok Wan’s willingness to offer emotional guidance and assistance during the participant’s overwhelming naked moment in front of the mirrors, thus positioning him as embracing the role of a mentor/therapist. Secondly, Gok Wan’s symbolic and physical presence in the mirror sequence of the *HTLGN* discourse depicts the expert’s opportunity to open himself up to the possibility of a reflective and emotional subjective experience. Such a possibility allows him to engage with the subject as she undergoes her reflective process, and this opens up the possibility of the makeover expert emotionally, unconsciously and/or subliminally participating in the reflective encounter with the female subject. My case study analysis will explore this further later on.

In contrast to the reflective space of *WNTW*, where the presenters employ a negative strategy of scrutinising the subject's stylistic choices and tastes, in *HTLGN* the full-length mirrors constitute the beginning of the makeover 'method', thus symbolically providing a reflective mental space where one's emotions and body related fears, anxieties and insecurities can be expressed and explored. The makeover concept behind the mirror configuration in the makeover space enables Gok Wan to become acquainted with the subject's body related troubles and thus he becomes an observer of the emotional resistances and anxieties that transpire through her reflective narratives in response to her body-loathing experiences. Such a process does not only allow Gok Wan to decide how to craft the later makeover process in order to fit his subject's emotional needs, but also for the possibility of the female subject to confront any of her emotional resistance that has built over time between the 'mirror' object and her naked body-image reflection:

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** This week ... I'm meeting Kelly ...  
who, after being diagnosed with cancer, had surgery ... to  
remove her left breast.

Mastectomy is a common but emotionally stressful surgical procedure performed all around the world (Euster, 1979). According to Pamela Ashurst and Zaida Hall (1989), a woman's identity, her perception of herself as a woman, her femininity, and her self-confidence are closely bound to her body image. Yasmin Farooqi (2005) argues that breast cancer victims who must undergo mastectomies often

feel an added loss of femininity and the majority of women find the loss of a breast extremely distressing:

**Kelly:** Cancer has completely changed how I feel about my body ... what I can wear has been dictated by my cancer and you are not left with much else from what you see in the mirror.

**Gok Wan:** ... [D]o you wear a prosthesis?

**Kelly:** Yes.

**Gok Wan:** How does that feel?

**Kelly:** It feels horrible ... I do not want to admit that it is a prosthesis ... I know I cannot have my body back.

**Gok Wan:** So, what we have to do now is get you undressed and use these mirrors to have a really good look at your body in a full 360.

Kelly removes her clothing and Gok Wan invites her to position herself in between the three full-length mirrors, to look at, and reflect on her troubled relationship with her body. Here, it is important to acknowledge that a reflection process over the naked view of the body is absent from the *WNTW* frame, since the format is solely preoccupied on how the clothes look on the body and not how the subject emotionally relates to and experiences the body with the clothes on and off. Clearly, the subject's raw and naked reflection of the body in the mirrors activates and emotionally heightens the experiences felt by it. As the following passage reveals:



*Figure 4: Kelly self-reflects and Gok Wan is listening*

It is then in this instance where the Kelly's 'naked' reflection becomes overwhelming for her and moves her to tears. Gok Wan, who stands visibly behind Kelly, becomes aware that the mirrors have triggered her body related anxieties and brought emotional troubles to the surface:

**Gok Wan:** What are you reacting to?

**Kelly:** I don't really want to look. I just see a body that has let me down.

**Gok Wan:** ... [W]hat you are finding the hardest?

**Kelly:** Just thinking about how I feel with my underwear on and you cannot see the worst of what I see. So, I did not think I'd find it this hard ... I do not feel feminine from the neck down and I do not feel feminine from the neck up either. I do not like looking at my face because it does not look like me ... (choking up).

**Gok Wan:** Why does it not look like you?

**Kelly:** It is my hair. (Kelly had experienced hair loss due to chemotherapy).

In response to this selected makeover extract I would like to draw attention to a number of symbols and rudimentary elements that in my view are emblematic of the therapeutic discourse of this show. At the same time, I will contextualise how *HTLGN* develops an innovative makeover turn that gives rise to new scope for televised images of feminine emotional subjective experience. As mentioned earlier, the initial manifestation of a therapeutic discourse became apparent in the makeover format of *WNTW* through the symbolic use of the couch as a form of enactment of a consulting room. In *HTLGN*, the notion of a popular ‘therapeutic’ mediated discourse is evoked through the symbolic use of mirrors in conjunction with Gok Wan’s presence in the makeover context, where he embraces the role of mentor/therapist, a role that manifests itself through his reflective narratives: “What are you reacting to?” in response to Kelly’s tearful reaction to her naked mirroring. Such an observation allows me to position Gok Wan as an apparent example of a reconfiguration of the role of the expert to that of the ‘charismatic’ role of a mentor/therapist, a role that he embraces and which transpires through the way he identifies his female participant’s anxieties and neuroses, and this in turn allows me to consider the makeover discourse as a symbolic product of the therapy ethos.

It is important, briefly, to discuss the concept of mirrors and their relation to the psyche. The word ‘mirror’ comes from the Latin *mirari* meaning ‘to wonder at’ and ‘mirroring is a wonderful process ... called reflection’ (Huber, 1999:33). In the Winnicottian object relations tradition, the concept of mirroring exists as a symbol of the mirror-role of the mother’s ‘gaze’, which reflects her infant’s feelings and emotional states thus allowing the infant to reach emotional development and self-growth (Winnicott, 1971). In my analysis of the programme’s visual and textual narratives, I will apply Winnicott’s object-relating concept of the mirror-gaze to the reflective gaze that Gok Wan makes available for his subjects during the mirror reflection sequence of their *HTLGN* process. It is my view that his mirror-gaze availability constitutes one of the distinctive ‘makeover’ features employed by Gok Wan. Gok’s affective gaze not only serves to inspire trust in his subject but also to generate a ‘safe’ space where the female participants can voice and emotionally express their subjective experiences in relation to their body related anxieties, whilst at the same time making them feel emotionally understood. In my case study, I will further develop this argument by exploring the reflective gaze of the makeover subject towards Gok Wan in the ‘mirror’ sequence of the makeover process, and how this reflective encounter might trigger for the expert himself an unconscious awareness of his own former body related experiences.<sup>13</sup>

An additional attribute of the mirror, which in this instance is evoked by the *HTLGN* makeover discourse, is that its reflection facilitates a subject’s inner world to be observed, recognised and/or transformed through the visual reflection of the

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<sup>13</sup> As I will discuss in Chapter 5, it is well documented across the media and through the publication of his autobiography that Gok Wan has also suffered extensive body related anxiety in the past.

body. The latter is in effect since the concept of mirroring opens up spaces to reflect on previous or hidden and emotionally unexplored states as it creates a visual reflection of self-identity. This account is emblematic of the importance of the mirror in psychoanalysis, where it facilitates a reflective development of self-understanding. In the psychoanalytic setting, the mirror finds its equivalent in the reflective presence of the analyst's 'gaze', where unvoiced inner emotional states of the patient's psyche, articulated in the form of symbols and associations, begin to surface. Rustin argues that:

The psychoanalytic process, and its therapeutic and observational derivatives, involves exposure to an emotionally significant experience, through the "transference" relationship in its various forms. It is this "learning through feeling" that gives psychoanalytic method its distinctive power and depth. This is also what makes psychoanalysis an ongoing process in which the interaction of two persons, and their conscious and unconscious responses to one another, is itself the subject-matter of their encounter and the basis for reflection and interpretation ... a capacity to move, in feeling. (Rustin, 2002:8-9)

Therefore, it can be argued that psychoanalysis becomes a 'mirror [of our popular] time[s]' (Rustin, 2002:9) where, in its manifestation within the makeover space, it informs us of the current (unvoiced) emotional subjective states that exist within our popular culture today. In addition, the symbolic reflective engagement between expert and subject invites spaces for dialogue, revealing and signalling new dimensions of popular female subjective experiences, which are articulated through the employment of symbols, and associations that derive from the reflections upon the body. Such emotional verbalisation in the makeover reflective space opens up a learning capacity for the subject (and by extension its viewers) to understand these emotional responses to the body, thus allowing an emotional

exploration of the self to begin. Here, it can be argued that reflection upon these emotional resistances in the makeover space, which transpire through the emotional reflection on the body, signal the body as a barometer and carrier of all of these deep-rooted emotional states that dwell in our popular culture today.

The mirror sequence scene is a significant element of *HTLGN* since it creates new spaces of feelingful subjectivity and a revelation of emotional subjective spaces, which can be viewed as emblematic of therapy culture. It is apparent that therapeutic culture holds a certain feminine quality, since ‘it offers a space where women were taken seriously as speakers and listeners and their authentic experiences endorsed’ (Wood, 2009). The notion of therapy culture and the constant search for happiness, as well as finding ways to make oneself to feel better, is suggestive of a feminine practice in contemporary Western culture and in the market place. Yates (2011:60) reminds us that ‘the search for emotional well-being has feminising connotations ... [since] political dilemmas of femininity are personalised and worked on at the level of the emotional body’.

Emotionally laden stories are the trademark of confessional reality makeover programmes, as they privilege ‘common sense’ and everyday life experience and debate domestic issues like women’s health, relationships and family. Women are ‘emotional specialists’ (Richards and Brown, 2002) in negotiating emotional dilemmas; they interpret experiences, ‘managing femininity’, and therefore they take a leading role in managing the transformation of their life-projects. Women continually engage in what Giddens (1992) describes as a form of ‘reflexivity’, which involves ‘reflecting on the meanings of one’s life and the choices one faces,



and using that reflection to shape the future' (Richard and Brown, 2002:109). It is the exploration of popular feminine concerns and public discussion of current female emotional dilemmas in relation to the body which lend weight to the makeover programmes' role as examples of the therapeutic discourse and therefore feed into the development and entrenchment of therapy culture more broadly, because of the extent of their emotional appeal to the female audience.

Kelly's inner emotional reflections in relation to her 'naked' body experience in the public space of the makeover frame confirm the blurring of boundaries that I identified in relation to the depiction of the 'couch' in *CR*, and this confirms the manifestation of therapy culture. In addition, the *HTLGN* setting, like talk shows, engages with 'women-centred narratives and identification', since it recognises female participants' ordinary concerns, emotional dilemmas and everyday struggles as politically significant. Kelly's reflections on her struggles are taken seriously by the expert, who offers a space where she can openly talk about those concerns that were previously invisible and unacknowledged. This claim is central to recognising *HTLGN*'s cultural positioning of the makeover format in facilitating a therapeutic opportunity. *HTLGN* facilitates the notion of talk as an important feature of its method because women are invited to open up and speak of the body related troubles that often have no name and are thus difficult to overcome.

In the makeover space, the woman's body is at the centre of private feminine concerns, and thus the concept of melodrama in the *HTLGN* frame holds a 'feminine' inflection, since it insists on accentuating the female qualities of expressivity, sensitivity and emotions. In support of this claim, Gledhill (1987:10),

explains that melodrama is tailored specifically to female audiences ‘by the large space it opened to female protagonist, the domestic sphere and socially mandated “feminine” concerns’ about personal relationships. Therefore, *HTLGN* allows female viewers to negotiate aspects of their own experience and to interpret their concerns through the self-reflective narratives of the female participants, who now develop into the viewers’ ‘emotional representatives’.

The naked reflection of Kelly’s body in the mirror produces for her an overflow of feelings, an ‘emotional excess’ that in turns activates a process by which she is reminded of all these body related struggles that have been tormenting her since her recovery. The mirror sequence provides her with the opportunity to emotionally articulate them in a makeover attempt to potentially overcome them. This makeover moment signals what Freud (1914) defines as the ‘remembering, repeating and working through’ process.

The mirror reflection of the ‘naked’ body becomes the activating force of the self-reflection process. The emotional excess triggered by the naked visibility of the female body produces what Peter Brooks (1994) terms as the ‘melodramatic body’: ‘The melodramatic body is a body sized by meaning’ (Brooks, 1994:18).

Emotional excess is one of melodrama’s trademark characteristics and, for Peter Brooks, emphasis is placed upon the centrality of the body in offering melodramatic meanings. In the beginning of his chapter, Brooks (1994) writes that ‘the body is a vehicle of meanings (11) ... [since it] becomes a place for the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere, and

cannot be articulated verbally' (22). In the makeover space of melodrama, the expressionistic body is usually a woman's body that is 'the most important signifier of meanings ...' (1994:19), since it becomes an object where the subject measures its success and failures, as becomes evident in Kelly's reflective narratives: "I just see a body that has let me down!". Brooks links the concept of melodrama to the psychoanalytic concept of "acting out": the use of the body itself' (1994:19). For instance, the 'naked' body in the makeover space offers visual messages through its gestures, its sites of pain, loss, excitement, irritation and scarring, and therefore becomes an object of inscription where highly emotional messages are written.<sup>14</sup> In the convergence of melodrama and psychoanalysis perceived by Brooks (1994: 22), melodramatic acting out demands 'the use of the body itself, its actions, gestures, its sites of irritation and excitation, to represent meanings that might otherwise be unavailable to representation because they are somehow under the bar of repression' (1994:22).<sup>15</sup> However, melodrama 'refuses repression, or rather, repeatedly strives towards moments where repression is broken through, to the physical and verbal staging of the essential: where repressed content returns as recognition' (Brooks, 1994:19). Here, a classical psychoanalytic commentary is pertinent. Freud writes that in the classical psychoanalytic method of *free association* and *dream interpretation* 'the power of words' or the development of language provides inaccessible (repressed)

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<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 3, I will draw upon the emotional experience of 'shame of ordinary women in response to postfeminist inscriptions around body ideals and with that in mind I comment on how the emotional and bodily expression of shame, such as 'blushing', is highly visible and well documented in the popular makeover frame.

<sup>15</sup> 'Repression' is a mechanism of defence first mentioned by Sigmund Freud. In his paper 'On repression', Freud defines the basic idea of repression as follows: '*The essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*' (1915a: 147). Elsewhere Freud (1915b:166) wrote that 'the essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious'.

material a link to conscious recollection and ‘access to unconscious laden and emotionally loaded material’ (Morris, et al., 2015:24).

Therefore, it can be argued that the ‘melodramatic body’ (Brooks, 1994) in *HTLGN* and the reflective meanings that are conveyed in the subject’s naked mirror reflection allow for emotional subjective experiences and unconscious recollection to (re)surface. In Kelly’s case, the reflective sight of her scarring, the loss of her breast due to mastectomy, skin burn from radiotherapy and her hair loss due to chemotherapy produce emotional resistances in her, which become apparent in her reflective narratives: ‘I do not want to look!’ These are emotional resistances that the potentially ‘therapeutic’ discourse of *HTLGN* can address, as it offers a space for emotional understanding, where feelingful states and troubled subjective experiences of the body are expressed and, most importantly, managed. In effect, the mirror(s) in *HTLGN* generate more specifically a space of confrontation for the participant where often avoided emotional subjective experiences can be talked over, explored, (re)worked and remembered as a way of ‘working through’ resistances (Ellis, 2000).<sup>16</sup>

It can be argued that the televised space of *HTLGN* offers a popular ‘therapeutic’ space where its subjects can engage with new modes of reflexivity, which in turn can lead towards a psychological awareness (Richards, 2007) and self-knowledge. Richards and Brown emphasise that talking about feelings is commonly linked to a “therapeutic attitude” since it involves a certain kind of process that is seen to be

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<sup>16</sup> The mechanism of ‘working through resistances’ was first explored by Freud (1914:155) in his essay ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working Through’.

having ‘life-transforming potential’ (2002:110). In particular, they state that it is through talking and self-reflection that one can achieve ‘a *state* (or process) of self-knowledge’:

Self-knowledge, defined as knowledge of one’s feelings, is seen ... as the only key with which to access the deepest kind of truth about oneself and one’s life ... once emotional expressivity is conjoined with self (other) knowledge, it is not only a knowledge of what we feel that would be evident, but a particular form of self-reflection ... [Therefore] it is not feeling per se which is central, but the way in which we narrate and reflexively order what we feel or have been feeling.

(Richards and Brown, 2002:111)

The self-reflective strategies and the numerous tasks involved in the makeover process, as well as the subsequent interactions between the presenters, open up new possibilities for a new self to be created and self-knowledge to be acquired. Through such experiences one can be (re)discovered, hence the emphasis on being made-over. It is the ‘feminine’ and highly ‘emotionalised’ space of the makeover discourse, created through the subject’s emotional reflections in relation to the body, that makes Winnicott’s theoretical ideas pertinent for the psychoanalytic exploration and emotional significance of the makeover discourse in providing a space of ‘cultural experience’, where aspects of the self are negotiated and emotional subjectivities explored.

Additionally, it is the emotional subjective experience that is reflected onto the body that allows one to read the makeover narratives of *HTLGN* through Winnicott’s theoretical lens, as a space which facilitates the emotional exploration of the inner and outer sense of subjective self.

It is in the programme's public discourse that popular subjective experiences of body related troubles and body-loathing experiences can be safely voiced, emotionally expressed and potentially worked through. Chapter 3 further interrogates this view from a gender perspective and examines the role of Gok Wan's makeover in formulating a 'safe' postfeminist space, where current feminine body loathing experiences that were once silenced are now culturally acknowledged and given a space to be safely voiced and emotionally understood. To do this I will point to various postfeminist cases of body loathing experience and use object relations psychoanalysis to explore the internal and cultural processes that are involved when engaging with popular media depictions and definitions of body beauty ideals. Object relations psychoanalysis confirms its place as a methodological tool, since it allows us to explore the emotional and unconscious investments made in such programmes and the ways in which the media, and television in particular, become, as Bainbridge (2011) describes, 'objects' of our internal world, thus shaping our sense of identity as a result'. These assertions contribute towards the development of my thesis that postulates the 'therapeutic' value of the *HTLGN* approach for its female subjects and the viewers as their extension.

### **Gok Wan's 'feel good' therapy**

The notion of 'therapy' promises to make you feel better and in contemporary western culture this notion is linked to the desire for achieving 'emotional well-being' (Yates, 2011). Today in the UK, since positive 'well-being' is aligned with looking and 'feeling good' and the 'charismatic' makeover experts incorporate

CBT practice-based techniques and positive thinking, both of which invite the makeover subject to ‘re-write [their] script life’ (Yates, 2011:70). As depicted, in the makeover space of *HTLGN*, the female subjects are taken on a psychological and often emotional journey to unpack the cause of their negative body image and, in so doing, discover a new appreciation for their bodies just as they are.

As noted above, the promotion of therapy culture and the availability of the ‘quick-fix’ methods (Yates, 2011), originate from the widespread availability of CBT therapy techniques, since this form of therapy tends to cure the symptoms and focus on positive feelings. The following section will explain the ‘feel-good’ approach promoted by the *HTLGN* discourse by drawing on the psychological practices and self-esteem building exercises that are incorporated as part of the Gok Wan makeover approach. This discussion signals that *HTLGN* practices are affiliated with contemporary CBT definitions of ‘quick fix’ therapy to enhance the ‘emotional well-being’ and self-esteem of the makeover participant. The following extracts will provide evidence for these claims.

As noted above, the episode introduces Kelly with an explanation of how her experience of breast cancer has left her with low self-esteem. As I explored earlier in my chapter, the first stage of the makeover process involves Kelly’s initial mirror confrontation with her body-fears and anxieties. In the following makeover stage, Kelly is invited into the studio setting to meet ‘the Gokettes’, a line-up of underwear-clad women who serve as a means of physical comparison and show the candidate that the body part she is most concerned about is not nearly as problematic as she thinks it is. In Kelly’s makeover instance, her low self-esteem

and body anxiety derives from her post-cancer treatment and through her belief that her mastectomy removed her right to feel ‘pretty and feminine’.

Therefore, Gok Wan prepares a ‘Gok shock’ psychological exercise and asks Kelly to compare herself to a line-up of women of a similar age and who have had similar lifestyles. In this case, they all survived breast cancer and three have undergone a full mastectomy on one or both breasts. However, Kelly is not aware that all of these women have undergone the same experiences and treatment:



*Figure 5: Kelly’s line-up silhouette challenge<sup>17</sup>*

**Gok Wan:** I want you to look down there and tell me which  
of these ladies, first of all, if any of them, have had cancer?

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<sup>17</sup> Frith, et al. (2010) in their journal article *C’m on girlfriend, Sisterhood, sexuality and the space of the benign in makeover TV* signal that Gok Wan’s line-up challenge echoes the ‘silhouette studies’ in psychological research as means of measuring the degree and direction of body dissatisfaction. Using a silhouette technique, participants are presented with figure-line drawings depicting a series of body shapes from very thin to the obese. The participants are usually asked to indicate which figure they believe best represents their body shape, and which one they perceive as an ‘ideal body shape’. Sarah Grogan (1999) offers an overview of this approach.



**Kelly:** You can't tell?

**Gok Wan:** ... can you tell if any of them have had any kind of breast surgery at all?

...

**Kelly:** No

**Gok Wan:** Girls, can we have a little raise of hands now if you have had cancer?



*Figure 6: The women who have had breast cancer treatment  
raise a hand*

Every single one of the women raises their hands and Kelly looks completely surprised:

...

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** With their clothes on, Kelly can't tell all my line-up have had breast surgery, so kits off ladies, so she can have a closer look.

**Gok Wan:** Tell me, are any of them ugly?

**Kelly:** No! They are all good-looking girls ... They are all really smiley and happy. They have got sparkly eyes ... and they are all standing there, confident.

**Gok Wan:** Ok, so put your hands up if you have got a prosthesis?

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** So, that is three out of five who have had a full mastectomy like Kelly.



*Figure 7: The women who have undergone a mastectomy  
raise a hand.*

**Gok Wan:** Do you think these women here are any less gorgeous because of what you have identified there? Has your opinion changed from before?

**Kelly:** NO.

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** Having recently come through cancer, do they feel the same way as Kelly about their surgery or about wearing a prosthesis?

**Gokette:** Now, I'm nine months down the line. I have sorted my underwear and my clothing, so it doesn't bother me anymore ... It was hard [at the beginning] - I had not had one three times previous. I had hung on to my breast ... it was a big decision, but it's the best thing I did because I feel now that it's gone, I can start my life again.

**Gok Wan:** Do you think you are ready to take your gown off and join these ladies?

**Kelly:** Yeah, I do!

**Gok Wan:** I think ... you should absolutely stand proud like all these other women here, to realise that yes ... you have been dealt a very unfair deck of cards. And it is hard and tough, and no-one will take that away from you, but what you've got to do is learn to live with what you've got, realise that you are ... a [gorgeous] woman.

Within the therapeutic procedural framework of *HTLGN*, CBT techniques are widely used as part of the makeover process of re-identification with one's body

and mind. The two procedural techniques of *HTLGN* that are put into practice by the makeover expert, Gok Wan, incorporate self-management, self-reflection and self-esteem training - techniques that fall under the CBT umbrella. However, even though the use of the 'quick fix' therapy approach is evident through the creation of various 'Gok shock' exercises, it is my view that the makeover space activates a space of female-shared experiences, which transpire as a method of understanding one's body in relation to the self as well as to others.

Rustin (2007) reminds us that, since we live in a fragmented society where object relations are bankrupt, citizens are in need of 'symbolic identification' and emotional investments that are low risk and easy to maintain. It could be argued then that the *HTLGN* discourse can offer its participants and viewers 'positive opportunities for the exploration of the self in symbolic terms ... and a space for a creative self, a space where meanings can be found and created' (Rustin, 2007:62). Drawing on Rustin's ideas, I argue that the makeover space of *HTLGN* offers a positive opportunity to generate emotional relatedness and symbolic identifications during the makeover process, in order to allow its subjects to create new meanings and associations for their bodies and/or body parts that cause them to feel discontent. For Kelly, such symbolic identification is evident during the makeover line of *Gokettes*, where Gok Wan opens up the space for her to reflect on other women's experiences with breast cancer, thus allowing Kelly to create new meanings and associations and (re)evaluate her own perceived experiences and her outlook on her body.

Furthermore, my case study analysis will further develop Rustin's view, by making a case for how creative aspects of the makeover process provide the female subjects with the cultural opportunity to explore aspects of self-experience in an emotional and meaningful way, and to establish new associations through the body that contribute to inner self-awareness. It is through such experiences that one can be (re)discovered, hence the emphasis on being made-over.

Creative aspects of the makeover process echo many of the basic essentials involved in our earliest mental states, in particular fundamental aspects involved in the development of the mother-infant relationship. This idea is supported by Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis, which I will further expand in Chapter 4, where I will examine the creative aspect of the *HTLGN* makeover frame in facilitating emotionally constructive opportunities that enrich notions of selfhood and provide a frame of 'cultural experience' for the makeover subject to creatively engage with unexplored aspects of her identity in order to gain a deeper emotional understanding of her inner self-experiences in relation to the body.

Returning to Kelly, such symbolic identification is evident during the makeover line of *Gokettes*, where Gok Wan opens up the space for her to reflect on other women's experiences with breast cancer, thus allowing Kelly to create new meaning and associations and thus to (re)evaluate her own perceived experiences and outlook on her body through the 'Gokettes' who become Kelly's 'emotional representatives'. To enhance my claim on how the makeover format opens up the space for the negotiation of everyday concerns experienced by women, I will draw on a *HTLGN* special (Series 4, Episode 6), where Gok Wan revisits some of the

most emotionally difficult cases during the series, returning once again to Kelly, whom he meets eighteen months after her successful *HTLGN* makeover participation.

Gok Wan discovers that as a result of her changed body-image perception, Kelly has become a breast cancer ambassador, on a mission to help other women who are dealing with the effects of breast cancer treatments:

**Gok Wan:** What was it like watching yourself in front of those mirrors for the first time?

**Kelly:** I did not think I would find it that hard, but it was like a real sense of a summary of everything that I felt, all my emotions coming up. I think it was actually quite therapeutic.

...

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** But it's not just her own self-confidence Kelly's turned around. I have brought three women to meet Kelly ... Terri was a former breast cancer nurse and has recently been diagnosed with breast cancer herself. Tora was diagnosed with breast cancer at 29 just like Kelly and Dr Emma Pennery has been a mentor and support to thousands of women like [Kelly].

...

**Dr Pennery:** Well the key thing was all the people that use our discussion forums and our helpline, they shot up afterwards, ... everyone felt so inspired that if they were

feeling low, they would say, ‘We know we can feel better again’ and ‘we can look good after breast cancer.’

....

**Tora:** I watched the programme, I was so touched ... it made me more confident about how I look now, because I am quite nervous about that, so that made a difference.

**Terri:** I was really touched with your approach; it was so typical of most women to see yourself turn around and come out of it so positive ...

What transpires through Kelly’s reflective narratives, along with those of the three other women who have also dealt with breast cancer, is the notion of emotional and body relatedness. In this thesis, I do not draw on any further reflective narratives that may have taken place outside the makeover text; instead, I use these accounts as a starting point to consider the makeover’s therapeutic possibility to reach the viewer by introducing makeover cases that address the everyday woman, since the programme contemplates a variety of body issues experienced at some point by all women in different stages of womanhood. As outlined in Chapter 1, this allows the makeover subjects to be recognised by the viewers as their ‘emotional representatives’, where the subjects’ narratives and struggles can be interpreted by viewers as their own experiences, and so enable them to negotiate their own body dilemmas. It is in this moment that emotional relatedness begins to form for the female viewers. In the next chapter, I will explore the postfeminist space of *HTLGN* and consider how it has opened up an area of shared experience, where current

emotional feminine subjective experiences are voiced, expressed and emotionally explored. Here, it is important to remind oneself that the reflective space of female emotional relatedness is activated first during the makeover method between the makeover subject and her encounter with ‘the Gokettes’. Subsequently, it stretches out to the *HTLGN* viewers, as an extension of the female participant.

Later on in my thesis, and as part of my case study analysis, I explore the emotional investments and unconscious processes that are at play between the makeover expert and his subjects through the psychoanalytic lens of object relations. This analysis allows me to investigate to what extent the makeover programme can be perceived as a positive and constructive popular mediated space, where our identity and emotional aspects of our inner subjective sense of self can be explored and understood.

My work departs from the view of *HTLGN* as a ‘quick fix’ makeover method and negotiates its positive value in formulating a ‘cultural experience’ where the self can be (re)created, (re)discovered and explored in a meaningful way. The application of object relations psychoanalysis is pertinent for the development of this study. This reflective analysis will allow me to consider the programme’s therapeutic value and to explore Gok Wan’s position in British makeover culture as key leading figure of the *HTLGN* ‘feel good’ approach. This claim will be addressed later in my thesis, when the *HTLGN* experience leaves the confined space of the makeover format and is restaged within an advertisement campaign setting. Gok Wan’s cultural involvement in an advertisement campaign makes a



case for his position as a dominant figure in contemporary British makeover culture, as Chapter 6 explains.

Although *HTLGN* conforms with the neoliberal discourses and contemporary mediated view of ‘charismatic therapy’ to enhance the participant’s emotional well-being, my work considers *HTLGN* to be an emblematic feature of what Barry Richards describes as ‘therapeutic culture’ i.e. a more positive view of therapy culture. Drawing on Richards’ writings, I argue that *HTLGN* welcomes a therapeutic experience as it creates positive opportunities for meaningful self-experience by opening up spaces for emotional dialogues and self-reflection. Richards (2007:34) describes ‘therapeutic culture’ as ‘the quest’ for ‘self-discovery and self-fulfilment’:

... the term therapeutic culture is a suitable shorthand for the collection of values and aspirations which gather round this quest ... It is about finding the, or a, truth of life, by locating what is believed to really matter most in feelings and relationships, rather than in work, outward achievements and possessions. (Richards, 2007:34)

According to Richards (2004), the therapeutic ethos within the media frame is not a simple cathartic moment but rather a process that involves the ‘management’ of emotions rather than just the ‘expression’ of them in the public and private spheres. This chapter has demonstrated the validity of this claim in its discussion of the changing significance of the couch as a key symbol of changing emphasis in the makeover discourse.

In a similar vein, Giddens (1991) perceives therapeutic discourse as a positive feature of our culture today, as it involves a continuous development of our identity

and the self, as we knowingly engage with it and work endlessly to refine and understand it. Giddens recognises techniques of ‘self-therapy’ and self-reflection as important components of later modernity that eventually can lead to self-growth. Media, and television in particular, can provide spaces for self-reflection and emotional experiences through our engagement with it. Television is a medium of considerable power and ‘emotional significance’, and for Silverstone (1994), television has the ability to order our lives by providing us with resources in order to make sense of ourselves. Silverstone recognises television’s ability to order our lives by providing us with resources in order to make sense of ourselves and has the potential to challenge our identity and inner self-experience. Recognising the value of Silverstone’s work, my research innovates in this respect by psycho-culturally exploring the ways in which popular media frames can create cultural opportunities and offer up new definitions that can shape our sense of self and identity as a result.

Television’s power as a medium arises from its ability to challenge many different layers of our inner world; therefore it is appropriate to analyse it in relation to its therapeutic discourse by psycho-culturally studying the reality makeover frame of *HTLGN*. In my primary research, I have marked out a significant moment within reality programming that crystallises the positive outcome of the therapeutic discourse that emerges within the popular media landscape as well as the power of television in providing opportunities where ordinary people find a way to deal with life’s uncertainties and interpret their experiences in a meaningful way.

The media example that I cited originates from the famous *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. As discussed earlier, Oprah's talk show was popular worldwide, but in 2011, and after 25 years of running, Oprah Winfrey announced that it would come to a close. In recognition of her contribution and the achievements made by the show, the producers completed the series with a farewell celebration for her. The show finale took place in the Staples Centre in Los Angeles on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 and was broadcast by ABC. The two-part finale special included all the celebrity guests that had appeared on the show throughout its 25 years but also made room for the reminiscences of the ordinary people's life – stories that signalled the show's success and its impact on viewers.

In order to demonstrate the show's therapeutic impact on its supporters, attention was drawn to Oprah's media persona. During the second part of the farewell show, a group of teenage girls made an appearance on stage calling themselves 'Oprah Show Babies', signifying how the show helped them to shape their identity and personality and how it offered them comfort, consolation, and reassurance throughout troubled times. The teenage girls were brought forward to stand in front of Oprah on the stage, recounting the emotional impact of the talk show on their lives:

We call ourselves Oprah Show Babies. Your voice has been the soundtrack of our lives. / Every milestone, every first you were there. / Because of you Oprah, I love to read books. / I have learnt to stick to my beliefs and not let anyone change who I am. / Your show has taught me to take care of myself, I am 13 and I have lost 20 pounds. / Oprah, my mum and I watched your show every day together, I was 14 when she died and I know she will want me to continue learning from you. / Oprah, you helped lift the shame of being abused, it taught me that it was not my fault, thank you. / We have learnt from the Oprah show

that we are enough, that we matter, and that our lives have value. / Because of you every morning, I look in the mirror and say: Good morning gorgeous! / Oprah, I have learnt from you that I can be anything I want to be, like the president of the United States.

I consider this televised moment a signification of the positive effect of therapeutic discourse within television. This moment underlines the therapeutic potential and power of television, creating a space where audiences feel contained and prepared to deal with the messiness and uncertainties of life and their emotional tribulations. This latter raises a different view of therapy culture, one that encourages the audience to embrace the disappointments and uncertainties of life and to learn to live through them. Therefore, it could be argued that through emotional engagement with various media channels, such as talk shows, makeover programmes and so on, the audience could potentially find ways to deal with their emotional tribulations.

This is in opposition to the earlier view of therapy culture that sees its place in our culture today as mainly focused on the individual's 'emotional well-being' and the avoidance of disappointment. This vision of therapy culture is also apparent in Gok Wan's approach in the makeover space of *HTLGN*. Such an observation becomes evident through the way the presenter encourages his participants not only to embrace their own identity and to learn to love their bodies but also to accept the way life has potentially challenged them and to learn to live with its messiness and uncertainties due to pregnancy, cancer, bereavement and accidents which have led to disabilities etc.

Later on in this thesis and as part of my case study analysis, I will explore the caring role of Gok Wan and his ‘good-enough’ (Winnicott, 1971) approach. This generates a ‘holding space’, where his female subjects’ emotional subjective experiences can be ‘safely’ contained and the notion of self can be securely explored and (re)discovered. More particularly, from a psychoanalytic approach, I will explore the notion of trust that the ‘openly gay’ Gok Wan [‘Aunty Gok or Fairy Gok-mother’] inspires in his makeover subjects, who learn to feel comfortable in baring their emotional and physical ‘naked’ troubles as well as in following his advice and completing the naked makeover challenges. In psychoanalytic detail, I will explore his intimate, non-intimidating and emotionally attuned nature towards his participants’ emotional needs, as well as his affective ‘mirroring’ (Winnicott, 1971), thus allowing me to read his makeover presence as embracing an almost motherly approach.

In conclusion, what is noteworthy here is that the debate on therapy culture in relation to media discourse has a certain messiness attached to it, as this notion constantly gets recycled depending on the socio-cultural changes that occur within society. It is that messiness that exists in regard to the meaning and connotations of ‘therapy culture’ that invites the use of Winnicott’s theories and ideas on object relations, making them highly pertinent for this research.

In the following chapter, I offer a postfeminist discussion of the *HTLGN* discourse, where I interrogate the affective impact on ordinary women’s relationship to their bodies of ever narrower judgments of body and beauty ideals in images promoted by print media culture. Drawing on object relations psychoanalytic theories, I will

signal how emotional definitions of what constitutes a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ body are internalised by ordinary women and how these manifest themselves in the makeover framework. Drawing on this discussion, I will make a case using Winnicott’s concept of ‘holding’ for *HTLGN*’s postfeminist possibility and its cultural value in formulating a ‘safe’ space where current embodied feminine subjective experiences can occur. Here, they can be emotionally expressed and safely voiced rather than remain silent and culturally unacknowledged.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Framing the *How To Look Good Naked*'s postfeminist opportunity**

In my previous chapter, I explained how the cultural fascination with the notion of 'well-being' and 'feeling good' about oneself is strongly related to the idea that our culture today is in fact a therapeutic one. The increased preoccupation with notions of selfhood as well as the importance of reflecting on emotional and feelingful states as part of identity production is ever present in our contemporary media culture. In many ways, the makeover programme *HTLGN* has become an emblematic feature of this cultural trend.

For the postfeminist woman, 'feeling good' translates into constant body beautification and self-grooming practices, fuelled by consumerism in pursuit of finding happiness through the body. Popular terms such as 'shopping [retail] therapy' or 'beauty therapy' are deployed to connote such a pursuit and are used widely in the makeover narratives of *HTLGN* to mark its therapeutic and postfeminist discourse. The centrality of these tropes in the programme's continuing success can be seen as a clear outcome of 'therapy culture'.

'Postfeminism' has become one of the most fundamental yet contested notions in the lexicon of feminist media and cultural studies, because of its different interpretations among scholars (Genz, 2006; Lotz, 2001; Tasker & Negra, 2005). Postfeminism is mostly conceptualised in 'the academic context of television studies, in the media context of popular culture and within consumer culture'

(Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014:175). In its most widespread popular definition, Ann Braithwaite (2002:335-44) argues that the prefix “post” in the word “postfeminism” causes a lot of discussion. “Post” is often considered as “after” or even “anti” feminism. But “post” also has a positive connotation for a considerable number of authors. They see it as “in relation with” or “related to” feminism, not “split from”, and they use the term to point out the changes in feminist discourse. In response to this discussion, Braithwaite (2002:341) states that postfeminism ‘is not *against* feminism, but *about* feminism today’.

For Gill (2007b), postfeminism is a key concept within feminist analysis, and rather than arriving at a singular definition, she asserts that ‘postfeminism should be conceived as a *sensibility*’ (2007b:148, italics in original). In her article, Gill describes varying ‘themes and features’ that ‘constitute a postfeminist discourse’ (2007b:149). Some of these features include the notion of understanding femininity as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification; a focus on self-regulation, self (and popular media) surveillance and self-improvement to enable transformation in line with a makeover paradigm, as well as the celebration of individualism, personal choice and empowerment. Based on the ‘themes and features’ that Gill outlines as a postfeminist *sensibility* is an intersection with the contemporary context of neoliberal, late-capitalist society, characterised by consumer culture, individualism and postmodernism (Adriaens, 2009). These characteristics locate the emergence of ‘postfeminism’ in the early 1990s onwards. This time frame is significant as it parallels the emergence of lifestyle makeover programmes, which aim to create postfeminist spaces that promote the neoliberal imperatives of self-surveillance and self-control. These



spaces/programmes encourage constant work on the feminine body through the reliance on lifestyle experts to provide advice on how to improve oneself, achieve well-being and happiness through the body and thus generate autonomous forms of feminine subjectivity. Postfeminism, then, becomes a new critical way of understanding the changed relationship between feminism, popular culture and femininity.

Amanda Lotz (2001:106) explains that ‘postfeminism can be an extremely valuable descriptor for recognizing and analyzing recent shifts in female representations and ideas about feminism’. Being a postfeminist media product, *HTLGN* can be perceived as a valuable indicator in signalling the importance of the current focus on emotional concerns and shared experiences of feminine subjectivities, such as body loathing, low self-esteem and weight concerns, just to name a few.

It is important to interpret *HTLGN* in its postfeminist context. There are competing definitions of ‘postfeminism’, since it is a cultural term that has been criticised, evaluated and mourned with regard to feminist values. The term ‘postfeminism’ involves a complex relationship between culture and politics. The emergence of postfeminism as a critical discourse and popular term has been interpreted as indicating that ‘feminist struggles’ have been achieved. Feminism is assumed by adherents of postfeminism to have opened up ‘equality and opportunity in terms of gender in all aspects of economic, social, professional, domestic and political life’ (Isbister, 2008:5). So, ‘the development of postfeminist theory reflected the institutionalisation of feminism and provided a space for more reflexive feminist

discourse' (McRobbie 2004). It has been argued that the normalisation of feminism has prevented it from existing as discrete politics; rather 'it emerges as a kind of slogan or generalized "brand"' (Banet-Weiser, 2007: 208), as in the case of 'Girl Power', which has been politically appropriated as an 'other feminism' (Tasker & Negra, 2007:4), emphasising 'ultra-feminine looks and a sexualized image as a means of empowerment and agency' (Chen, 2013:441). This 'othering' refers to a disavowal of feminism and a subsequent 'buying in' to an 'empowered' and often ironically self-aware femininity that celebrates consumption and freedom of choice as often seen in makeover programming. Arguably, then, if consumption is offered as a practical space for the expression and containment of a subject, these popular postfeminist texts invite their subjects to invest in neoliberal individualism, 'self-surveillance' (Foucault, 1979), personal responsibility and an unfailing faith in the capitalism that fuels all these practices.

Since popular texts have 'incorporate[d], assume[d], or naturalize[d] aspects of feminism' (Tasker & Negra, 2007:2), they foreground the assumption that second wave feminism has been 'taken into account' (McRobbie, 2009:12) and create a 'backlash' (Negra & Tyler, 2007:1) against feminism and its popularity. It is then recounted in media and some academic debates that feminism is therefore 'no longer needed' (McRobbie, 2009:8). Recognising feminist values as no 'longer needed' within postfeminist contexts resonates with what Bainbridge describes as a feeling of 'loss', an experience of a certain 'nostalgia' (2013b:226) for an ideology which has led to a process and need for mourning. Bainbridge explains that cultural debates on postfeminism resonate with certain assumptions about the 'pastness of feminism' ..., [with] feminism's apparent cultural death in the new age of postfeminism entail[ing] an important psychical loss in this context, a loss

which must be properly mourned in order to be overcome' (Bainbridge, 2013b:224-226). While many of these perspectives lament the loss of a space of feminist politics, it is nevertheless possible to argue that postfeminist media texts and discourses can serve as a 'holding' space, thus allowing for emotional and feminine relatedness to emerge. As I discuss below, the notion of 'holding' here is evocative of Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis, and I argue that the postfeminist space of *HTLGN* provides a safe 'place', where the makeover subject may gather herself together through the expressivity of her emotional subjective ambivalences in relation to her body.

Winnicott comments that the availability of 'holding' (which can take either a physical or psychological dimension) contributes to the child's emotional development. The 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1960b) which is provided by the mother's capacity for care and empathy towards the child's needs is beneficial for the child's emotional and ongoing development. This 'holding' availability facilitates the eventual separation from the mother but most importantly leads the child towards a sense of inner self-awareness and self-growth. The context of this holding environment is an activation of the child's sense of their own being in time. In Chapters 4 and 5, which form the case study analysis of my thesis, I interrogate more analytically the process of 'ongoing' development that becomes available for the female participants in and during their makeover in *HTLGN*. In particular, I comment on the makeover moments when Gok Wan guides his female subjects from an emotional state of 'absolute dependence' (Winnicott, 1960b) that exists in the vulnerable moment of their mirror sequence, towards a state of 'independence', where they reach a sense of self-awareness and self-growth after

they have completed the makeover challenges that Gok Wan has set out for them. This discussion allows me to respond to a key aim of my thesis, which signals an evolution of the makeover frame. In response to that ‘holding environment’, as it becomes available in the *HTLGN* method, I will interrogate the role of Gok Wan, who in the makeover process embarks on a motherly approach. Or he becomes, as Winnicott terms it, a ‘good enough’ m/other<sup>18</sup>, since Gok Wan reveals a capacity for empathy and caring responses towards his subject’s emotional reactions and experiences during the *HTLGN* process.

Consequently, the holding environment ‘protects the fabric of the child’s “going on being”, by holding or sustaining over time the child’s developmental proof of being alive. Holding in this way involves the provision of a “place” of psychological state in which the child may gather, collect or hold themselves together’ (Collins, 2014:55). Thomas Ogden draws on Winnicott’s holding environment in the context of a clinical interpretation of a patient’s thoughts, feeling, dream or symptoms. He says that in the holding environment, interpretation means:

to generate that human place in which the patient is becoming whole. This type of holding is most importantly an unobtrusive state of “coming together in one place” that has both a psychological and a physical dimension. There is a quiet quality of self and of otherness in this state of being in one place. (Ogden, 2004:1352)

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<sup>18</sup> The use of word m/other instead of mother is suggestive of the possibility that a motherly approach is not provided only by a mother but potentially by ‘other’ caretaker.

Clearly the makeover setting is not replicating a clinical one. However, one can see this dynamic space of caring, nurturing and growth in the makeover setting of Gok Wan and the experiences of being there in time and in body. Drawing on Winnicott's idea of the 'holding environment' helps us understand how the postfeminist experience of *HTLGN* provides an affect that initiates a transformative agency. This leads to growth and a sense of being and provides a 'holding' space where the subject is allowed to enter into one place and make sense and reflect on their emotional troubles and concerns in relation to their bodies.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will showcase how such a 'holding' function is validated by the emergence of the makeover programme *HTLGN*, which, despite its postfeminist inflection, has opened up spaces for emotional dialogues, and for feminine emotional subjectivities and maternal 'ambivalences' to be heard, voiced, emotionally managed, acknowledged and culturally understood.

As feminist literature informs us, achieving this ideal of feminine beauty and the perfect body is a long-standing aspiration of women in western culture (McRobbie, 1991; Hill et al., 1992; Frost, 2001). In our contemporary postfeminist (celebrity) media culture, women are constantly defined in terms of their body image rather than by their skills and abilities. The notion of happiness and 'having it all' in a postfeminist moment is defined in terms of feminine beauty ideals and notions of body image perfection. The ideals of feminine beauty and the perfect body, as promoted and reinforced by the cosmetic, weight-loss and fashion industries, create in women a 'dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging,

and dread of lost control' (Wolf, 1991:10), thus leading ordinary women to encounter a self-perceived failure which develops into body-loathing.

Even though current female subjective experiences of body-image frustration are a product of popular postfeminism and celebrity culture, it can be suggested that the 'holding' capacity of *HTLGN* can be interpreted as a 'constructive postfeminism' moment, as it opens up popular cultural places where such damage can be undone and feminine embodied anxieties can be worked through. Here, I make use of the term 'constructive' in response to Winnicott's notion of 'cultural experience'. He treats this as something positive that enriches the notions of self and thus contributes towards an emotional understanding of our inner and outer subjective experiences in relation to the self with others, as well as to our society more broadly. Therefore, the employment of the term 'constructive postfeminism' is suggestive of a popular mediated place and of a space that offers emotional possibilities for the feminine self to attain emotional growth and an inner sense of understanding popular feminine experiences in relation to the body. Later on in this chapter, I will signal how popular postfeminist media culture, and more specifically makeover television programming, also produce such anxieties by generating binary definitions of what constitutes a good and bad 'postfeminist' body. Here, I use the terms good and bad 'postfeminist' body to indicate a split between the bodies that are obedient to the postfeminist neoliberal inscriptions enhanced by consumerism. For instance, the 'good' postfeminist body engages in retail practices as therapy to alter one's mood, buying products to 'feel good' and better about oneself when experiencing feelings of unhappiness and lack of feminine self-worth. Additionally, 'good' postfeminist practices that reflect the

body's well-being include constant dieting, and submission to the industries of cosmetics, fashion etc. in the pursuit of attaining feminine beauty. On the contrary, the 'bad' postfeminist body reveals signs of physical neglect in its appearance, and thus absence from postfeminist practices around consumption. Later on and as part of this chapter development, I will psychoanalytically examine how postfeminist media definitions of what constitutes a 'good' and a 'bad' postfeminist body are generated through popular (print) media and how images of beauty body ideals become culturally internalised by ordinary women, activating feelings of frustration towards their 'real' body imperfections. Klein's psychoanalytic concept of 'splitting' will facilitate the development of this postfeminist discussion.

First, however, this chapter will show that *HTLGN* opens up several important questions. For example, despite the consumerist agenda of the programme, does it show how postfeminist culture opens up space for the exploration of emotional subjectivity within its makeover discourse? The female body plays a key role in the construction of postfeminist meaning. Following such a widely acknowledged perspective, how does the good or bad postfeminist body define feminine subjectivities, and how is such a split generated in the postfeminist media, and the makeover format in particular and media in general? Also, how does the good and the bad body confine and measure the ways in which postfeminist women meet cultural expectations, and how does this mark the fallibility of the female body in the makeover format? Most importantly for this thesis, how do object relations psychoanalytic theories help us to understand how internal representation is created in response to makeover narratives, and what is at stake emotionally for female participants and viewers?

Makeover programming has been evaluated and criticised by academics from both feminist and postfeminist perspectives (Doyle & Karl, 2008; Palmer, 2008; Phillips, 2008; Sherman, 2008). McRobbie (2009) puts forward a critical feminist outlook in the context of makeover programming. Highlighting the ‘symbolic violence’ at work in makeover shows, McRobbie draws particular attention to *WNTW* and centres her argument on the makeover’s regular focus on the importance of class and taste as an essential component of a feminine identity as well as an obligatory female duty.

As McRobbie suggests, according to the presenters of this programme, women today, in order to fit the frame of modern capitalist womanhood, must portray power, independence and self-reliance, and above all must convey the signals of middle class/identity/style/composure/taste/elegance and hide any traces that suggest otherwise. Nonetheless, the women who are chosen to take part in the makeover programme come either from a working or lower middle class background, and have been criticised by the presenters for lacking self-care practices, and for neglecting their postfeminist duties. As a result, the presenters negatively, and sometimes violently, scrutinise the participant’s lack of engagement with middle-class practices through the use of narratives that lead to the participant’s feelings of shamefulness and embarrassment. The presenters have been described by McRobbie (2009) as the ‘meanest’ women, since their approach towards their female subjects involves elements of bullying and humiliation.

Since the makeover programme format centres on the lifestyle practices of class and taste, McRobbie draws upon Bourdieu’s work on *Distinction* (1984) in her



feminist analysis. She underlines how the lack of cultural capital and habitus is exposed as a means of passing judgement about female representation. McRobbie (2009) draws attention to the first aspect of the programme, which focuses on the woman's life, her family background, her workplace and her taste. The experts pass judgements, which have been described as brutal, and they perceive a lack of classiness as a criminal offence. Hence, when they are about to choose, the two women (from five) who will undergo the makeover are positioned behind a glass window that looks like a police station, in order to decide who is going to be charged with a fashion crime. One can argue that this staged parody of a police station, and the depiction of the female participants as criminal suspects of fashion and style, is what allows for the *WNTW* experts to get away with the critical judgments and/or insults that they are employing in that makeover setting. Gok Wan, however, does not employ this mode of address, and that is why his makeover tactics and approach may be more broadly appealing. In Chapter 5, I will draw psychoanalytically on the 'charismatic' persona of Gok Wan within the makeover setting and scrutinise the key characteristics that contribute to his development into a dominant figure in contemporary media culture and the widely accepted and much celebrated view of him as 'the one who cares'.

For McRobbie, such a makeover enactment is indicative of Foucault's metaphor of the 'Panopticon', where 'one becomes a self-policing subject and self-committed to a relentless self-surveillance' (Foucault 1979:201). It is also an evident depiction of how self-surveillance practices are portrayed through popular makeover formats in order to teach their subjects to invest in neoliberal practices. Moreover, the presenters' cruel treatment of their female subjects is expressed

through their mode of talking, a very harsh use of language that emphasises the wrongdoing of the participants when it comes to the choice of clothes and the representation of their self and body:

‘she looks like a mousy librarian’, ‘her trousers are far too long’, ‘that jumper looks like something her granny crocheted, it would be better on a table’, ‘she hasn’t washed her clothes’, ‘your hair looks like an overgrown poodle’, ‘your teeth are yellow, have you been eating grass?’ and ‘Oh My God [...] she looks like a German lesbian’. (McRobbie, 2009:144)

The participants, or the ‘victims’ as McRobbie describes them, end up in tears and confess on camera their feelings of embarrassment and humiliation. What McRobbie’s analysis demonstrates is the fragility of the self and how this is contingent on emotional experience that is drawn out through negativity and cruelty, or what might be described in sociological terms as a form of ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu, 2001). In the following section, what becomes evident is that even though in the feminist framework there is no real room for destructive desires, psychoanalytic theory provides a way of negotiating this.

Building on this insight, my psychoanalytic approach will interrogate the deployment of such negativity to understand what is at stake emotionally. Here, it is important to consider how a psychoanalytic framework offers us a platform to understand the importance of such emotional complexities. For that reason, Klein’s work on ‘negativity’ becomes instructive here in order to understand how the ‘assertion of destructiveness’ can generate a ‘condition of possibility’ (Gordon, 2007:172). The cruel and negative approach of the presenters towards their subjects gives rise to the stereotype that many feminists ‘regard violence as

intrinsic to woman's relationships' (Gordon, 2007:175). This is, nevertheless, a view that feminism rejects, as it sees women's relationships as involving empathy, collaboration and affiliation between women. Gordon (2007) argues that by considering the feminist view of female friendships as based on goodness and idealisation, it is implied that there is no possibility of violence. Drawing on Gordon's (2007:176) analysis of the film *Crush* (Alison Maclean, 1992, NZ), what becomes apparent is that the 'violence between women erupts from acts of idealisation, [and] the hope for a supportive bond authorising the destructiveness it presumes to resolve'. According to Gordon (2007), violence between women is read 'as serving patriarchal interest, reproducing woman's social and psychic subordination' (ibid), a view that is clearly anti-feminist:

Klein's theory of idealisation establishes a "goodness" that can have no meaning beyond the influence of aggression and assault against which she sets it. At stake in Klein's theory is a destructiveness that finds its most exquisite expression in the melodious chorus of love. ... Klein's work exposes a "need" for violence, a risk of destruction without which there can be no ethics, subjectivity, or life. Articulating this "need," ... what we can call negativity, the destructiveness that puts at risk the very thing—love, goodness, life—it makes tenable. ... Without the violence that will destroy it, there is no way of imagining a friendly female friendship. It is a powerful wager: no repair or restitution, but rather a persistent retrogression into hatred and destruction announces the possibility of supportive, empathetic relations between women. (Gordon, 2007:179)

In *WNTW*, then, the negativity and cruelty involved in the relationship between the female presenters and their subjects suggests that inherent destructiveness allows for subjectivities, relationships and identities to emerge and this functions as a mechanism of self-preservation. As a result, elements of negativity become the intermediate space where new identities are being discovered and re-created.

Such an observation shows the relevance of the earlier supposition that sees postfeminism as serving a 'holding' function for feminine subjective experiences, as well as becoming a current indicator in signalling current feminine subjective and shared experiences.

Even though McRobbie's work offers a feminist outlook on the makeover show, as well as a critical analysis of its format and how the body is subject to violence in its public representation, what is missing is a more in-depth emotional exploration of the fragility of the self, and how it is stage-managed on such programmes. My reading then offers an alternative to understanding how language inflicts violence on the body and instead becomes a powerful mode of articulating experience. Given the emphasis on such aspects of self-experience in the context of 'therapy culture', it seems important to articulate this further.

In contrast to *WNTW*, Gok Wan's makeover format encourages women who are insecure with their bodies to reveal their anxieties and fears with regard to their naked body. The programme is built upon self-reflective and positive self-esteem exercises, in order to help women to learn to love their bodies despite any flaws and/or imperfections. Gok Wan's makeover mission through his programme's self-reflective discourse is to encourage the celebration of the 'real' beauty of ordinary women, as well as to liberate them from their constant hunt for and obsession with measuring up their real bodies against the illustrative and perfectly airbrushed celebrity silhouettes. Gok Wan takes a unique and innovative approach with regard to the transformational process of the female participant's body. For *HTLGN*, the notion of transformation is aligned with altering the subject's own

emotional misconception in relation to the body. Therefore, Gok Wan is a primary focus in guiding his participants into a body transformation that does not incorporate extreme measures that involve a surgeon's scalpel or the employment of verbal insults about his participant's body and/or appearance. For instance, Gok Wan never encourages women to undergo cosmetic surgery or lose weight in order to measure up to the artificial images of female beauty, as repeatedly depicted in other popular makeover discourses such as *Extreme Makeover* and *10 Years Younger*, nor does he endorse the techniques and deployment of language that activate intense feelings of shamefulness, embarrassment and humiliation towards his subjects' bodies, as seen in *WNTW*. However, mediated experience of emotions such as shame and embarrassment are frequently articulated by the female subjects in makeover formats and so cannot be absent from *HTLGN*.

In *HTLGN*, emotional states such as shame and body loathing experiences are revealed in order to generate a subjective experience of emotional familiarity between the female participants and the viewers, and therefore to enhance the opportunity of generating a feeling of emotional relatedness among them. It is through that relatedness that, in my view, the programme provides its viewers with the reflective opportunity within a 'holding' space to manage their messy emotions and to understand the subjective self on a public and a private level, while at the same time acknowledging and reflecting on feelings as well as engaging in emotional reflexivity. It is evident that such a formula parallels the therapeutic processes being used and this allows me to develop the concept of *HTLGN* as providing a 'holding' space for its subjects and, by extension, for its viewers which can in turns be emblematic of a 'constructive' postfeminist media experience.

An indicative example is the case of Alison in *HTLGN* (Series 3, Episode 6), who is a 26-year-old girl working as a part-time bouncer, a job that makes her feel quite butch rather than feminine. In *HTLGN*, the first stage of the makeover process involves the ‘mirror sequence’; this stage of the programme involves consultation with Gok Wan. First, Gok Wan asks his female subject to look directly at her own reflection in the mirror, before she removes her clothes down to her underwear. This is a procedure that Alison has not performed in many years due to her own body loathing. At the same time Alison is asked to evaluate for Gok Wan her emotions and thoughts about her body’s reflection. The body part she hates the most is her ‘bum’ and she believes that her ‘deviant’ body is her fault:



*Figure 8: Alison’s mirror reaction of shame*

**Gok Wan:** Just talk me through what goes through your head?

**Alison:** Apart from disgust ... It is disgusting! A woman’s body is supposed to be kind of hourglassy ... This is just a pear on legs.

**Gok Wan:** ... What part of your body do you absolutely hate the most?

**Alison:** My tummy and my bum, I just think they are horrible.

**Gok Wan:** What does it feel like to hate your bum this much and your tummy? Come on tell me, get me in there.

**Alison:** You end up despising yourself; I hate the way I look! I do not want to look like this and I know it's my fault, I know I should have done more, and now it's got to the stage where I just don't know what to do about it ... I want to be feminine and sexy ... I just want to feel like [a woman], because at the minute I don't. ...

**Alison:** ... I have never been described as pretty or beautiful or sexy ... And I would love that, I would like somebody to take notice and to go, "Wow!"

Alison's experience of shame is also communicated through her 'melodramatic body' (Brooks, 1994:18) simply by a quick glimpse at her reflection. For instance, there is a close-up of her twisting her fingers into the big jumper that covers half of her body, while she bites her lips as her face goes slowly red. Her body becomes the centre stage of attention; shame heightens feelings of embarrassment, desire for escapism and avoidance of looking at herself.

Rosalind Coward argues that 'women's relationship to cultural ideals and therefore to their own image, could be more accurately described as a relation of narcissistic damage' (Coward, 1984:80). Therefore, emotions such as shame, humiliation, embarrassment and other emotional states are in fact what make them feel that they are not good-enough. Feminist researchers have underscored how women do not frequently critique larger cultural norms as problematic; rather, many self-blame

and internalise a sense of private bodily failure, embarking on fitness routines, plastic surgery, and dieting practices to rectify anxieties about bodily lack (Bartky, 1988; Duncan, 1994). Such a remark becomes transparent in the makeover moment of Alison's reflective narratives and through her statement: 'I do not want to look like this and I know [it] is my fault, I know I should have done more.' It can be argued then that *Gok Wan* allows them to feel this pain and therefore creates the space for audience identification, since this is a common thought among ordinary women.

Research on affect theory has explored how the feelings of inadequacy and failure upon which the makeover genre is premised, as Gareth Palmer (2004) suggests, are associated with feelings of shame that are intimately linked with the self (Ahmed, 2004; Probyn, 2005; Munt, 2007). For Phil Mollon (1993), shame heightens the awareness of the self and a wish not to be seen, so that the response of a shamed person is always to look away, downward to avoid eye-contact, and the basic aim is to hide when one does not want to be visible (1993:48). However, Elspeth Probyn (2004) underlines that shame is born out of a bodily desire to fit in, whilst knowing one cannot and realising there is no place to hide. Such an emotional description of shame is depicted in Alison's makeover, in her avoidance of looking directly at the mirror, blushing and hiding her naked body and particularly her tummy when she looks at her reflection.





*Figure 9: Framing Alison's reaction and expression of body-shame*

Confessions of this shame are written all over media texts, showing the extent to which many women have internalised these standards of body acceptability (Bartky, 1990:76). Subjects of these programmes are female in a postfeminist moment and are under pressure to perform in order to fit in to the postfeminist dress. However, the fallibility of the body marks the point where women cannot meet those expectations.

Therefore, for the postfeminist woman, makeover programmes promise to transform the self into a liberated, empowered and independent woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as long as she is prepared at some level to acknowledge feelings of shame and frustration. Gok Wan's programme directly taps into the body related postfeminist experience, since he sets out to create a holding space for subjective emotionalities to be safely voiced. He holds out the possibility of being understood and eventually for any emotional and psychological resistances with regard to body related anxieties to be worked through. Therefore, by allowing emotional

experiences to be expressed by the subjects, and by giving them the opportunity to describe the way they perceive themselves, Gok Wan/ *HTLGN* enables spaces of emotional recognition and female relatedness to emerge for the viewers.

*HTLGN* emerges in a time frame when feeling good about oneself, and talking about positive self-esteem, has become a popular concern and a trend of postfeminist culture, as well as an illustrative case of therapeutic discourse. A clear example of such a claim is the development of the ‘Dove Campaign for Real Beauty’, a marketing campaign launched by the popular toiletry brand, Dove, in 2004. The principle behind Dove’s movement is to celebrate the natural physical variation embodied by all women and to inspire them to have the confidence to be comfortable with themselves.

As part of this campaign, in 2006, Dove started the ‘Dove Self-Esteem Fund’ (<http://selfesteem.dove.co.uk/>). This claims to change the western concept of female beauty from ultra-thin models with ‘perfect’ features, with the aim of making every girl (and woman) feel positive about their looks. In an effort to promote the fund, Dove commissioned a series of highly successful online short films, promoting the self-esteem concept for real beauty, through the promotion of tag lines like ‘I don’t want to be a model, I want to be a role model’ or ‘Who needs an ‘extreme makeover’? Not us’, ‘you are not flab you are fab’. The concept of those videos accentuates the ‘containing structures’ of mother-daughter relationships and female friendships, as well as creating an essential ‘facilitating environment’ for young girls and women to overcome and work through body related issues. Such space allows for the possibility of relatedness and shared

experience among women to emerge. Such a view underlines the cultural assumption that women are hard-wired for these types of behaviour and experiences. Such assumptions also persist in the makeover framework, despite the fact that there is a more forthright engagement with therapy and the inner world.

Such a proposal is followed up and also presented in the makeover format of *HTLGN*, where Gok Wan charts current feminine subjective experiences of body-loathing by presenting diverse cases, various causes and a variety of reasons for female body dissatisfaction. For instance, some cases involve body loathing as a consequence of being bullied, being overweight, social pressures, maternity and the ageing process etc. By tapping into the current variety of feminine subjective experiences of body loathing, Gok Wan broadens the aspect of female relatedness to reach different age groups, while tapping into different phases of womanhood as well as enhancing the chances for the programme to have therapeutic potential for its viewers. This creates tropes of highly emotionalised dialogue as part of the programme's approach. It is my view that such emotional dialogues create a space of 'cultural experience' for female viewers, as well as for the participant on screen to negotiate aspects of their current feminine subjective experiences in relation to the body in an emotionally telling way that leads towards self-discovery. It is in this area that my research will make use of Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis, thus arguing that it is relevant for understanding how televised emotional experiences can potentially shape and/or re-shape a feminine sense of identity as well as facilitate the discovery of the self. Winnicott's ideas are pertinent for the emotional exploration of the *HTLGN* discourse because of the

emphasis he places on the importance of the wider environment in regard to the rational self.

For Winnicott, subjectivity is deeply imbued with cultural experience as a reflection of our anxiety and desire. Winnicott emphasises the ‘experience of culture and pays attention to the interaction of the subject and object in the continual creative production of experience, self and meaning’ (1971:99). Winnicott explicitly links his descriptions of cultural experience in adult life to the ‘transitional phenomena’ of infancy and to the space that emerges between the infant and the mother for play. That space where subjectivity is constituted and reconstituted remains throughout our lives. It is arguable that the creative aspects of makeover programmes echo many of the basic essentials that are involved in our earliest mental states, in particular the fundamental aspects involved in the development of the mother-infant relationship, elements such as playing, creativity and illusion.

In *HTLGN*, Gok Wan introduces and incorporates his stylistic advice during the grooming of the feminine subject in a playful dynamic. It is this dynamic that allows the dressing up of the subject’s body to become an ‘intermediated area’ of a creative experience where feminine subjectivity can be safely explored, exercised and (re)discovered, in a ‘playful’ as well as a reflective manner. Such an approach encourages the female participants to build up their self-confidence during the makeover process and such a view becomes apparent in the girl-like behaviour that female participants embrace as their confidence develops. Later on in this thesis, and as part of my case study, my research will make extended use of

Winnicott's ideas in order to analyse the makeover practices and 'object relating' processes that are activated 'within' and 'during' the procedural process. I argue that it creates a space of 'cultural experience' for its participants and potentially its viewers as an extension of them.

### **The 'good', the 'bad' and the 'post-natal' body**

Gill reminds us that 'one of the most striking aspects of postfeminist media culture is the obsession and preoccupation with body image' (2007:255), which involves a continuous process of self-surveillance, body monitoring around food and calorie intake, and body-regulation which involves fitness and exercise regimes to attain or maintain an ideal self-image. For the postfeminist woman, the obsession and preoccupation with one's body image signifies constantly embarking on a diet to either lose or maintain an 'ideal' weight, consuming and applying cosmetic products to look up-to-date with beauty trends, regularly keeping a journal on calorie intake and constantly working on their physical appearance to look flawless. Directly instigated by postfeminist magazines and celebrity culture, the female body comes under continuous scrutiny in order to be either objectified, oversexualised or negatively depicted in popular (print) media (Gill, 2003; 2007a; 2007b). Body tags such as 'Sexy Body' and 'Yummy Mummy' are used in print media, e.g. *Heat* magazine (Holmes, 2005), to popularise as well as to commodify femininity within the broader modern-day market. In postfeminist media discourse, 'the female body is presented simultaneously as a woman's source of power and as always unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to an ever

narrower judgement of female attractiveness' (Gill, 2007b: 149). As a result, ordinary women are asked to fit these labels and definitions of contemporary femininity, thus valuing the female body as a key source of feminine identity.

In popular postfeminist discourse, the ideal feminine beauty is linked with happiness, fulfilment, well-being and control of the self. In the context of contemporary media culture, the youthful, fit and beautiful ideal images of celebrity culture become the ultimate goal of the body ideal for the postfeminist woman. Perfect airbrushed images that are physically unattainable leave ordinary women in all the various stages of womanhood constantly preoccupied with their physical appearance, fixating on their body parts that do not measure up to these celebrity media ideals. As a result, the ordinary woman who fails to fit in to the postfeminist dress condemns her body as it becomes the source of her frustration and unhappiness. Therefore, in an attempt to attain happiness and well-being, and to embrace her feminine bodily identity, the postfeminist subject embarks on neoliberal practices of consumption that involve a preoccupation with the body as an important 'project of the self', which is in constant need of updating and modifying. In the postfeminist discourse where the body develops into a neoliberal project, the ordinary woman must constantly engage in self-care practices, beauty and fashion regimes, dieting and vigorous exercises and consumption of surgical interventions to correct the flab, restore the ageing process of the skin and maintain a youthful looking body. The youthful looking body is suggestive of popular images of girlhood, where in the postfeminist inscriptions of celebrity image ideals, the girlhood/youthful body is considered a fail-free body that is objectified and highly sexualised and evokes the attraction and admiration of the male gaze.

The girlhood body fits in with postfeminist celebrity inscriptions and therefore is celebrated in the media. Therefore, the regulation and beautification of the postfeminist body must be exercised and practised in all the different stages of womanhood in order to maintain a youthful looking appearance, even during and after the course of pregnancy. For instance, in the postfeminist media discourse, once again, only the 'narrow' body type of pregnant celebrity beauty prevails and is sexually desirable, and this is the 'white, tight, youthful bodies with social capital and appropriate aspiration ... [but this] pregnant beauty reaches its apotheosis on how rapidly celebrities shrink back to the pre-pregnant size and shape' (Tyler, 2011:27). The 'Yummy Mummies' celebrity trend is a postfeminist phenomenon that portrays an idealised image of motherhood, of perfectly toned and slender bodies that bounce back into their original girlhood-body form shortly after giving birth, and which culturally promote the maternal experience as emotionally uncomplicated and free of any ambivalence. I will explore these postfeminist tropes further in relation to the experience of body image ideals, so as to consider their role in makeover format. In order to get to grips with these postfeminist discussions, it is important first to articulate how such popular media definitions of the good and the bad body are generated in popular media and how these images are internalised by ordinary women.

### **The body and its 'split' media images**

In the 'popular postfeminist discourse' (Gill, 2007b:149), the female body is divided into good and bad versions. The notion of good and bad bodies indicates a mechanism of splitting. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Otto Kernberg

suggests that one can view splitting as a ‘passive consequence of the separate building up of experiences linked with very positive and very unpleasant affect states [...] this separate building up can eventually be used for defensive purposes’ (Kernberg, 1989:83). The psychological mechanism of splitting in object relations psychoanalytic discourse is central to Klein’s theory, which ‘describe[s] the way in which objects come to be separated into their good aspects and their bad ones’ (Hinshelwood, 1991:434) through the employment of mechanisms of ‘introjection’ and ‘projection’.<sup>19</sup> However, it is important first to articulate how such popular postfeminist media definitions of the good and the bad body are generated in popular media and how such images are internalised.

Directly related to celebrity culture, beauty industries and popular (print) media, a postfeminist popular definition of female beauty can be linked to the preponderance of digitally enhanced images of airbrushed and photoshopped individuals. For the women living in a postfeminist moment, a sexy ‘good’ or a postfeminist body translates as an attractive object that is a source of constant gratification, since it conforms to the popular postfeminist inscription. It is a fit body, a lithe body, a healthy body and a beautiful body, a body so perfect that even after the course of reproduction, it bounces back to its youthful slender form. On the flip side of what constitutes a good body lies the definition of what counts as a

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<sup>19</sup> Melanie Klein (1946:99) expressed the view that ‘object-relations exist from the beginning of life ... that the relation to the first object implies its introjection and projection and thus from the beginning object-relations are moulded by an interaction between introjection and projection, between internal and external objects and situations.’ Klein’s ‘object relations’ relies upon her definitions of the twin concepts of introjection and projection, which are as follows: ‘Introjection means that the outer world, its impact, the situations the infant lives through, and the objects he encounters, are not only expressed as external but are taken into the self and become part of his inner life ... Projection, which goes on simultaneously, implies that there is a capacity to attribute to other people around him feelings of various kinds, predominantly love and hate’ (Klein, 1959:250).



‘bad’ body. A mediated definition of a ‘bad’ body is a body that reveals signs of imperfection, for instance flabbiness, cellulite, saggy skin, facial wrinkles, blemishes and/or ageing skin marks. A ‘bad’ body is depicted as a constant source of frustration and unhappiness for the postfeminist woman since she finds herself failing to keep up or to measure up to those cultural ideals. Our visual world of what constitutes an ideal body is reinforced through the constant exposure to popular print media images of perfectly enhanced female celebrity bodies, thus reminding the ordinary woman of the flawed bodies (and/or body parts) that seriously need reshaping and updating.

Susie Orbach states that:

a good 2,000 to 5,000 times a week, we receive images of bodies enhanced by digital manipulation. These images convey an idea of body which does not exist in the real world. [...] Staged photo shoots of female celebrities, styled to reveal ever smaller bodies, large breasts and ample bums on minuscule bodies, all of which infiltrate the visual field and reconstruct of how we see ourselves. Now we routinely judge our appearances through a hypercritical lens, objectifying our faults. (Orbach, 2009:89)

For the postfeminist woman who feels inadequate in relation to the visual images that popular and celebrity media dictate, the body comes to be considered as ‘bad’ and her personal imperfections as ‘self-neglect’. Here, self-neglect translates into the lack of self-care practices. In postfeminist discourse, where consumption fuels empowerment, independence, feeling and looking good, self-care and self-surveillance practices become the norm, requiring women to work on a diet, monitor their weight, consume cosmetic and beauty products, embark on extreme fitness regimes and subject themselves to invasive cosmetic surgery. Such are the

postfeminist commandments and duties for the attainment of an ideal good body. The notion of self-surveillance, which is closely related to postfeminist ideals, is not dissimilar to Foucault's already mentioned metaphor of the 'Panopticon' (Foucault, 1979:201); such a view indicates that women are always in need of being updated and fixed. So, in order to feel in tune with the cultural requirements of the beauty industry, and hence 'safe in their own skin', women must invest in emotional labour to attain well-being in terms of self-worth through the consumption of self-help media practices, to invest time and money in beauty body regimes such as a make-up, hair products, waxing facial and body hair, and incorporate self-care practices such as dieting and body workouts, all of which exercise the postfeminist notion of self-control, self-management, self-discipline and self-surveillance in the pursuit of improvement and transformation of the body into the ideal self-image. Therefore, the attainment of 'good' body becomes a 'project of the self' (Giddens, 1991) and hence a symptomatic feature of late modernity. By interiorising the idea of the self in such a project, the contemporary postfeminist woman acquires a sense of belonging and feelings of self-worth within culture today, as well as becoming a powerful postfeminist representation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century woman. We thus see the extent to which the media have generated divisions between a good and bad body that have been internalised. This leads ordinary women who believe in such divisions to suffer body distress, since they consider their bodies as bad or not good enough. In other words, media images foster female body anxieties – a time-worn debate that pervaded feminism during the 1970s and 1980s and that has been ingrained in hegemony in postfeminism.

The marking of what constitutes a bad body is not merely manifested in celebrity print media, since postfeminist television is also like a ‘magazine’ in its format, but is also fabricated and ‘marked’ in surgically enhanced makeover programmes. For instance, in surgical intervention programmes such as *10 Years Younger* and *Extreme Makeover*, the female body is perceived as an instrument of advanced engineering and/or as a commodity that needs to be fixed. For Orbach (2009), television makeover programmes as such:

... – show a relentless display of the ordinary body – usually female – in the process of reconstruction. Cheekbones, teeth, noses, lips, wrinkles, lines, breasts, pecs, legs, bum, chins, feet, labia, stomachs, midriffs, ears, necks, skin coloration, body hair become putty in the hands of cosmetic surgeons, dentist and dermatologist, who resculpt and transform the body into the alter ego where the end product recasts standards of what is a normal sort of beauty for all of us.

(Orbach, 2009: 81)

Intervention through cosmetic surgery is a key feature of several makeover shows. In the makeover consultation room, prior to surgery, the subject’s naked body is positioned and exposed in front of the surgeon to mark the body parts that need to be corrected or fixed. Those body parts could be droopy breasts, excess skin, facial wrinkles, blemishes etc. While the marking and drawing takes place, the camera zooms in accordingly, so that viewers will receive a magnified view of the ‘bad’ skin that needs to be worked on.

When surgeons divide the patient’s body into component parts, it enables both ‘surgeons and patient together [to] establish the problematic status of the part in question and its ‘objectives’ in need of repair’ (Dull & West, 1991:67). Therefore,

the bad-part objects are marked and fixed/corrected in order for the body to become a source of gratification for the postfeminist subject. Good practices as such involve: liposuction performed to tighten thighs and stomach area; laser surgery to make wrinkles and blemishes vanish, and the tummy tuck in order to correct flabbiness or remove excess skin as a result of rapid weight loss or pregnancy. Such makeover programmes have been criticised on the grounds that women are very passive objects, who hand their bodies over to surgeons and become 'a space, a project, something to be worked on by others' (Frith, et al. 2010: 475). The female body prior to surgery is evaluated, marked and drawn by the experts in order to underscore the bad skin or the bad 'part-object'<sup>20</sup> that needs to be nipped and tucked.

By marking the body parts and defining them as bad, makeover cosmetic interventions depict a view of the female body as problematic, fragmented and always in need of monitoring and improvement. Another method through which makeover culture establishes such clear divisions between the good and the bad body is in the choice of participants. This is because the transformation of extreme cases will result in a more powerful outcome, and the 'before' and 'after' pictures of the participant will generate a more powerful effect on both them and the viewers as an extension of them. The facial expressions of the subject on the print images are also significant and generate a powerful effect for viewers. For instance, the 'before' shot reveals an unhappy subject who is frustrated with her

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<sup>20</sup> The term 'part-object' is used when a person relates to just one aspect of what would normally be experienced as 'whole object'. 'The whole object describes the perception of another person as a person. The perception of the mother as a whole object characterises the depressive position. The whole object contrasts both with the part-object and with objects split into ideal and persecutory parts'. Part-objects are 'objects characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position. The first part object experienced by the infant is the [mother's] breast' (Segal, 1988: 127,128).

body image, whereas the 'after' shot reveals a happy subject whose body has become a source of gratification since the attainment of the ideal body/self has been accomplished.

Here it is important to turn to psychoanalytic theories and underline their relevance for understanding how cultural definitions of the good and the bad body are internalised. The notion of the 'good' and the 'bad' object/body points directly to Klein's framework of object relations theory. Object relations psychoanalysis is instructive here in understanding how internal and cultural processes are created and experienced in our contemporary culture, where popular media and television in particular become objects of our internal world, thus shaping our sense of identity and inner subjective sense of self as a result. In the psychoanalytic framework, the term 'object' was employed by Freud to 'designate the target of the drives, the "other" real or imaginary, toward which the drive is directed ... All of the most important psychic processes are produced by excesses or deficiencies of gratification; the object is merely the vehicle through which gratification is either obtained or denied' (Mitchell, 1981). The notion of the good and bad object is considered to be fundamental to the process and the foundation of early object relations.

Klein (1957) connects the infant's first 'object relation' to the 'mother's breast'. According to Klein, a 'whole object' is the mother, and the breast is the archetypal 'good object'. The breast instinctively is a source of goodness and nourishment and indeed of life itself. In normal infant development, the 'breast' is 'introjected' and securely rooted in the 'ego'. However, the infant's clear investment in the

mother's breast qualities goes far beyond nourishment, and inevitably it will fail to live up to the infant's expectations. The infant then will realise that the breast is not perfect and therefore will generate an internal conflict. The innate conflict between love and hate leads to the internalisation of 'good part-objects' (gratification) and 'bad part-objects' (frustration). Such conflict is essential for normal enrichment and growth of the personality and strengthening of the infant's ego. Thus conflict, and the need to overcome it, is seen as fundamental to human creativity. With the mother's breast being experienced as both 'good' and 'bad', the internal object 'splits' along with the ego. In the process of splitting, 'gratification and love feelings turn towards the gratifying breast while in states of frustration hatred and persecutory anxiety attach themselves to the frustrating breast' (Klein, 1946:101). Consequently, to the splitting of the object 'idealization is bound up, for the good aspects of the breast are exaggerated as a safeguard against the fear of the persecuting breast' (Klein, 1946:101). Idealisation is 'an essential process in the young child's mind, since he[she] cannot yet cope in any other way with his[her] fears of persecution' (Klein [1940], 1998: 349), and it derives from the innate feeling that an extremely good breast exists, a feeling that leads to the longing for a good object and for the capacity to love it (Klein, 1957: 193). Klein's work becomes relevant in understanding how cultural processes are constructed and how popular media shape our sense of self and of our inner world, as well as how they create meanings and make sense of our world. Drawing on Klein's writings on the notion of 'splitting', and the internal emotional processes that are involved in what constitutes the 'good' and the 'bad' object, provides us with necessary tools to understand and comment upon the cultural internal

processes that are at play in the visual and emotional perception of the good and bad postfeminist body.

The notion of what constitutes a good and a bad postfeminist body is visually apparent within popular print media and more particularly evident within the popular makeover format. For instance, the good/ideal postfeminist body, which in a symbolic way represents the good breast, belongs to the emotional experiences of gratification and happiness - a perfect body that has no fallibility and is a source of goodness. The 'ideal' postfeminist body, which is a portrayal of unrealistic popular media images of airbrushed celebrity bodies, conveys an emotional significance. The notion of the ideal body has the capacity to offer a rewarding postfeminist experience, thus validating woman's self-worth. Popular print media images of perfectly enhanced and flawless female celebrity bodies are internalised, as the good/ideal object by the ordinary postfeminist woman. Consequently, as Klein's work informs us, the postfeminist woman who consumes these celebrity images is profoundly inclined to the idealisation of the infallible/ideal celebrity body and thus to experience frustration and produce persecutory feelings towards the real failed body and her bad-part objects. The cultural and internal processes that I have commented on, with reference to the theory of splitting and in response to the good and the bad postfeminist body, transpire through popular makeover programming. The effect of these internal processes and persecutory feelings towards the ordinary woman's imperfect body becomes evident in the popular makeover format. In surgical makeover discourses, ordinary female subjects, who perceive their own bodies as problematic and therefore failed objects of postfeminist inscriptions, apply for surgical makeover interventions to update their

bad body parts in order to fit into the popular cultural ideal image of female beauty. The fixing and reshaping of the bad part-object/body into an ideal body through makeover intervention will replace their body frustration with feelings of gratification.

### ***A Naked case of ‘splitting’***

Ordinary women who are hoping or striving to attain a ‘good’ body are constantly finding themselves under pressure to meet the ‘media standards’ of ‘ideal’ manifestations of female beauty, and most of the time this unattainable struggle is a source of frustration and disappointment. For the ordinary woman, the good-ideal body object, which is the one determined by celebrity images, is internalised and becomes an object of love and worship. In the meantime, the bad object, which originates in the sight of their own bodies, where their imperfections do not measure up to the image of the ideal object, leads them to the experience of pain, distress and unwanted discomfort, and as a result, they ‘direct all [their] self-hatred on to the misrecognised object’ (Likierman, 2001:157). Such a position becomes evident in the makeover consultation of Debbie (Season 3, Episode 5) in *HTLGN*. After losing six stones of body weight and being a leader of her own slimming club, Debbie loathes her body and lacks self-confidence due to the excess saggy skin that the dramatic weight loss has left on her body:

**Gok Wan:** Tell me, what was it like to lose the weight?

**Debbie:** I felt really proud of myself!

**Gok Wan:** Was this how it was ever supposed to be?



...

**Debbie:** [No]... I don't look the way you are supposed to look.

**Gok Wan:** So, how are you supposed to look Debbie?



*Figure 10: Debbie compares her body-size with that of celebrities  
in magazines*

**Debbie:** You're supposed to look like how they look in the magazines, you know; it's supposed to look all nice and flat and you are supposed to look slim and slender and you're not supposed to look all big and you're supposed to look all pretty and skinny and just really – well not like this!



*Figure 11: Well not like this! and Debbie's pulls her tummy skin*

What becomes apparent from the above *HTLGN* extract is a visual manifestation of the way in which the postfeminist ordinary woman measures up and/or compares herself to celebrity/mediated beauty ideals. As is apparent through Debbie's reflective narratives, her body becomes a source of frustration and disappointment and its naked imperfections shake her sense of self-worth and postfeminist identity. Such popular postfeminist inscriptions with body image preoccupation 'invoke the familiar construction of femininity as nothing but surface' (Tyler, 2001:71), thereby validating that 'we live in a culture that continues to be obsessed with women's body size and body shape – that sees fatness and thinness as ultimate statements about people's worth ...' (Orbach, 1988:20). The body in postfeminist discourse is a 'project of the self', where ordinary women must constantly be self-conscious, preoccupied with constantly reshaping themselves through the reflective available versions of ideal bodies and womanhood presented by billboards, newspapers, magazines and television.

Debbie's reflective narrative reveals that her body seems deviant to her, a perception that manifests itself in the way she pulls and stretches her excess skin on her tummy, as Figure 11 illustrates. Such a depiction reveals her bad body part (her tummy) as a source of frustration and her ongoing struggle to fit into her postfeminist dress. Her body fails to meet the ideal/celebrity requirements of physical dimensions such as flat tummy, skinny frame and a slender body, postfeminist measurements that popular print media classify as normalities.

### **The maternal body as emotionally uncomplicated**

Postfeminist media inscriptions see pregnancy as the ultimate completion of the feminine project as well as the absolute triumph and zenith of feminine experiences. However, what is considered a successful pregnancy in postfeminist discourse is the ability of the 'pregnant beauty' (Tyler, 2011:22) to minimise weight gain, keep looking slender and maintain her youthful appearance. However, as I mentioned earlier in my postfeminist discussion of the body, the 'apotheosis' (Tyler, 2011:27) of motherhood is the body that bounces back and shrinks into its original pre-pregnant body form. This 'apotheosis' is promoted and achieved through the popular print media as they 'engage in a relatedness documentation of post-partum celebrity bodies. Dieting products, magazine fitness DVDs, promise to help women in their battle to "shed" pregnancy weight and achieve optimum "body bounce back"' (ibid). Postfeminist ideals of contemporary motherhood now prescribe a new set of tasks for women to endure that involve bodywork. Recent work suggests that heterosexual married (often middle-class) women now need even more endurance, not only to sustain paid labour, childcare and household

responsibilities, but also to carry out fitness regimens that allow for adherence to the latest bodily requirements (Dworkin, 2001; Dworkin and Messner, 1999).

According to Imogen Tyler such a view indicates that:

pregnant beauty is a disciplinary figure, which is symptomatic of a deeply entrenched 'disciplinary neoliberalism' in which the most intimate bodily experiences have become thoroughly capitalised ... [thus] offer[ing] women a skintight, attractive consumer-orientated version of maternity abstracted from the turbulent and messy realities of motherhood: the radical body change and fluid body boundaries, the extraordinary emotional physical demands that accompany the radical dependency of a child and the never-ending social judgement of motherhood. (Tyler, 2011: 27-30)

Becoming a mother is culturally and biologically considered to be the triumph of femininity and the ultimate completion of womanhood. However, 'exactly at the moment when a woman's body is accomplishing a highly valued route to femininity, she is least likely to be viewed as aesthetically ideal' (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004:611). Even though such a view has never been anticipated in postfeminist magazine culture, it has nevertheless found its way onto the screen via makeover television, and more specifically within the postfeminist space of the makeover discourse. Although the makeover discourse of *WNTW* has presented a case for the maternal in an episode titled 'Mum and Babies' (Season 4, Episode 1) its focus, however, is primarily around style, fashion and dressing appropriately.

Nevertheless, *HTLGN*'s format is still unique in its approach, since the focus is directly on the ordinary woman's emotional response and their ambivalence towards the experience of the maternal and how it has affected their emotional relationship to their bodies. In addition, the *HTLGN* method embarks on the

‘naked’ mirror sequence process, which allows for the subject’s inner emotional narratives to transpire and thus articulate their experience. This element is absent from the *WNTW* format since the makeover subjects only reflect on how they look with their clothes on and not on their naked body.

Therefore, it can be argued that *HTLGN* opens up a potential space for a dialogue that signals the turbulent subjective experiences of the maternal as well as the emotional despair and frustration that motherhood entails, not only in relation to the body but also around the ambivalent mother herself and her own subjective experience of the self in relation to the notion of the maternal. This is a surprising development of postfeminism, since it overvalues maternal bodies, reifies them as ‘perfect’. Such a view becomes evident in the case of Cindy Bristow (Series 3, Episode 2):

**Gok Wan:** Talk to me, who is staring back at you?



*Figure 12: Cindy, ‘the average tired, busy mum’*

**Cindy:** Someone short, fat and misshapen ... Just your average tired, busy mum ...

...



*Figure 13: Cindy's tummy described as 'a squeeze toy'*

**Cindy:** My body is an embarrassment to me! The confidence I used to have before having my children has completely disappeared. I have two tummies rather than one large tummy. My body is like a squeeze toy. Someone has squeezed it in the middle, let go and it's just stayed out of proportion ... When I look in the mirror it's not me that I see. It is not the confident person that I have always been.

...

**Gok Wan:** What are you thinking about? What's going through your mind?



*Figure 14: Cindy squeezes her tummy*

**Cindy** (grabs and squeezes her tummy and stomach area): It is this and this and this bit. If it means looking like this to have my children, that's fine. But they are not as dependent on me as they used to be. And what's left? I have got what is left over - what am I supposed to do with this now! It just looks deformed. It is just horrible!

The sudden and intense transformation that the female body undergoes during the course of pregnancy and childbirth often marks the body in a certain way that makes it harder for women to bounce back to their pre-natal bodies. Often in the makeover discourse of *HTLGN*, mothers situate and define their pre-pregnant bodies as 'having it all', as they looked beautiful, slender and confident. Such a view validates the postfeminist belief that the girl's body is defined as sexy and feminine, leaving women longing for that time when their bodies had a meaningful

place in the culture of postfeminism. Consequently, the physical effects of pregnancy, such as stretch marks on the surface of the skin, sagginess, flabbiness and so on, come to define the postfeminist post-natal body as 'bad' and meaningless.

In a culture where postfeminism defines pregnancy as the triumph and completion of femininity, the body after pregnancy is viewed as used and damaged. The excess skin and sagginess of the body becomes a constant reminder for the ordinary postfeminist woman that the sexy (post)feminist girly body that she once possessed has been sacrificed for motherhood and 'damaged by reproduction' (Orbach, 2009:87). As a result, for the postfeminist woman, the physical effects of pregnancy become a constant validation of her lack of femininity as seen in the case above. What is worth mentioning is that pregnancy reveals the actuality of the body as a fallible object, a reality that is not apparent for the ordinary postfeminist woman because of her constant exposure to the media regimes of the infallible bodies of celebrity mothers. Such images allow the postfeminist woman to create her own illusionary qualities of her girly sexy body as failure-free. As a result, ordinary women, who find themselves emotionally disturbed by the physical outcome of motherhood, develop persecutory feelings towards the unrecognised object/body, as seen in the case of Cindy. This echoes Klein's theory, highlighting how the internalisation of the post-natal body as a bad object produces frustration and feelings of discomfort while at the same time allowing women to idealise the good pre-natal body with the nostalgic quality attached to it.



Contemporary popular culture requires women to jump from the position of a 'Sexy Body' to a 'Yummy Mummy'. According to Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine (2008), the motif of 'having it all' (Erwin, 1996) has recently become feminised in British popular culture as the 'Yummy Mummy' fantasy of the 'svelte figure ... who can squeeze into size six jeans a couple of weeks after giving birth, with the help of a personal trainer' (McRobbie, 2006). The 'Yummy Mummy' term, according to Jo Littler (2013), has emerged as a cultural phenomenon and a site of intense consumer activity, a postfeminist notion of the maternal that is 'symbolically loaded as a glamorous and inspirational "lifestyle choice"' (Allen and Osgood, 2009:6). In contemporary Britain, the term comes to symbolise a type of mother who is sexually attractive, desirable and well groomed, who knows the importance of spending time on herself. The term is also frequently used to describe glamorous celebrity mothers. The 'Yummy Mummy' celebrities also promote images of ideal motherhood and the maternal experience as perfect and free of any ambivalent emotions.

According to Littler, postfeminism promotes the view that being just a good parent and/or exercising good parenting skills is not good enough, one must be a 'good' and 'responsible' neoliberal mother. Littler (2013) argues that the 'Yummy Mummy' term is evocative of a 'half sexualised, half childlike' mode of address which supports the view that 'postfeminism seems to be fundamentally uncomfortable with female adulthood itself, casting all women as girls to some extent' (Negra, 2009:14). Such a view leads us to think about postfeminism promoting girlhood as the ultimate moment and expression of female sexuality and body ideal. Such a view leaves ordinary women experiencing a sense of 'nostalgia'

for the girlhood/pre-pregnant body that is lost and sacrificed for motherhood. An interesting case that depicts such nostalgia is the case of Jeannie in *HTLGN* (Series 3, Episode 9). Jeannie has three children and her pregnancies have left their mark on her body. In an attempt to remember what her pre-natal body looked like, she compares herself to her identical twin sister Suzi.

In the reflective process of the makeover discourse of *HTLGN*, Gok Wan firstly asks Jeannie to reflect on her twin sister's naked body and point out the body parts that she admires on her sister and wishes she still had.



*Figure 15: Jeannie reflects on her twin sister's body*

**Jeannie:** I just see a very curvy girl, great knockers where they should be, even without a bra, lovely tummy nice and smooth. I'd like to look like that. I don't think ... Well, it's not possible now.

**Gok Wan:** I'm going to ask you to get changed.

**Jeannie:** Before I had my children, I don't remember what I was like, really, and that's why I look at Suzy. I know I was more confident. I was proud of my body and I knew that I turned heads. I used to be confident, and I want to be, but it is just gone.

**Gok Wan:** Just talk me through what you see in the mirror.



*Figure 16: Jeannie's 'cauliflower' tummy*

**Jeannie:** My boobs have always been big, but breast-feeding three children, I have lost a lot of the body here, and they are saggy. My tummy is full of stretch marks. It looks like a cauliflower here. It is like a road map gone wrong. It's not nice to look at, is it?

Andrew Wernick suggests that nostalgia is garnered around a 'sharp regret at the passing of time' (1997:219) but this is also a term that conjures up images of a

previous time when life was ‘good’ (2007:21). In the case of Jeannie, nostalgia revives a girlhood moment when she had power and control over her body, before losing it over to motherhood. But in contemporary postfeminism, what is powerful about being a girl? A (postfeminist) girl’s feminine body is ‘a site of liberation by which girls attract boys’ attention and use their freedom to choose what they desire’ (Bae, 2011:30). According to Robert Goldman et al. (1991), this feminist search for the value and meaning of woman’s emancipation through sexuality and bodily appearance constitutes ‘pseudoliberation’, since the female body becomes passive, objectified at the mercy of the male gaze. Consequently, the female body has a meaning and function when it achieves male admiration and approval. In the makeover framework of *HTLGN* this is manifested in the ‘masculine’ presence of Gok Wan, since his male gaze measures his female subjects’ beauty, worth and empowerment through their outer body appearance. Once this is lost due to weight gain, the ageing process and, as in the makeover case of Jeannie and Cindy, due to the physical effects of pregnancy, the body becomes worthless and meaningless and a source of discontent. Here it is important to note that in *HTLGN*, even though Gok Wan is a homosexual, his masculine stance occupies the space of the male gaze who is there to approve and this transforms the female body into a desirable sexual object to be consumed by heterosexual men.

### **Maternal Ambivalences: A *Naked* postfeminist opportunity**

In this instance, I would like to consider the earlier narratives of Cindy’s case, as it is my view that her body related frustration with her post-pregnancy body

projects her experiences of despair and frustration with the ambivalent experiences of womanhood. Such an observation becomes apparent in Cindy's statement:

if it means looking like this having my children its fine but they  
are not so dependent on me as they used to be and what is left? I  
have got what is left over - what am I supposed to do with this  
now!

Being a mother is conventionally associated with happiness; however, such a role is fuelled with conflict, anxiety and ambivalence and this is hardly ever acknowledged in mediated notions of female experience in a postfeminist age.

In his article 'On becoming a mother', Paul Trad writes that:

the meaning of motherhood-as-transformation, resulting in the resolution of ambivalence about separation and individuation depends primarily on the individual's experience, lifestyle and culture. ... After birth, the ambivalence and anxiety about separation may become primary issues between mother and child, as labour and the act of delivery and each subsequent developmental milestone signal the physical and emotional separation of mother and infant. ... women may feel anger, grief, as well as pleasure, at the experience of motherhood; but can these feelings be safely voiced? (Trad, 1990:342)

*HTLGN* places emphasis on the importance of maternal ambivalence as well as the 'negativity' felt by women towards their own bodies. This offers an insight into women's experiences. Once more, the work of Klein on the importance of 'negativity' is instructive here. Klein believes against the odds in 'goodness uncontaminated by violence or destructiveness' (Gordon, 2004:219). Gordon

comments that Klein's work reveals dramatically the insurmountable power and primacy of violence, hatred and destructiveness in the human psyche, and yet she insists that love too is primary, genuine and rooted in a deeply felt need to honour the 'good' (ibid). The woman is the bedrock, we might say, of a culture based on ethics of love and compassion. Popular culture, which serves patriarchal interests, idealises the experience of motherhood as a role full of goodness and hate-free emotions and it leaves no room for the possibility of negativity. In the work of Klein, negativity and any form of psychic violence can generate and sustain subjectivity and, as mentioned earlier, this generates a 'condition of possibility' (Gordon, 2007:172). Such insights help me to argue that *HTLGN* opens up a space where 'negativity' in the experience of the maternal can be expressed in order to allow for the possibility of subjective experience to be maintained. The excerpts analyzed above provide evidence of this.

In contemporary popular culture, maternal ambivalence remains largely unacknowledged and in moments when it is expressed, it is often considered as deviant and problematic (Parker, 2005; Hollway and Featherstone, 1997). Feminist researchers have highlighted that since mothers use other mothers as mirrors and measures of what they should expect of themselves, ambivalent maternal feelings are hardly voiced, as mothers fear moral judgment or criticism of their motherhood from others (O'Grady, 2005; Parker, 2005):

The cultural induction a woman receives, with its emphasis on the expression of positive emotions towards the infant may make it impossible for her to express her conflicts and ambivalent impulses, because such feelings are perceived as unacceptable and inappropriate for new mothers. (Trad, 1990:342)

For Winnicott, the mother is at one with her child in much of her early mothering work. This exclusivity of the relationship is heightened before and after the birth by a 'primary maternal occupation' (Winnicott, 1956:300), which is the mother's absolute devotion to the child's needs. According to Winnicott, it is through the recognition of its mother that the child comes to experience its own existence. The 'good enough' mother creates a 'facilitating environment' or 'holding space' in which the mother enables the child to discover its self and its boundaries (Winnicott, 1960a). Then the mother introduces the infant slowly into the external world by using the 'potential space' as an area of symbolism and play (Winnicott, 1958). The potential space or 'third area' is created in order for the infant to tolerate separation from the mother and also to create and discover its own self. As the infant gradually develops and comes out of absolute dependence, the child needs to repudiate her as 'not-me' in order to understand and differentiate between inside and outside. When the infant is ready, the mother gradually works to disillusion the infant about its own omnipotence (Winnicott, 1951, 1970). In order to separate from the infant, the mother needs to recognise the child as autonomous and differentiated, 'when the infant asserts this autonomy she [the mother] can feel frustrated and resentful of it' (Frost, 2010:10). This frustration that the mother is experiencing gives rise to feelings of guilt, which arise from the conflict of love and hate for her child:

From a maternal perspective the place of hatred in the mother's feelings for her baby can be understood to serve to enable her to differentiate herself from her child. She sees that the child can survive despite her hatred and learns that her love for her child can mitigate her feelings of hate. This understanding of herself and the ambivalence of her relationship with her child allows her to come to relinquish the fantasies of being the perfect mother to the perfect child. (Frost, 2010:11)

In the case of Cindy, the acknowledgement that her children are not so dependent on her anymore is reflected in her frustration with her body. The excess skin and the two tummies that she describes prevent her from achieving a return to her own individuality. On this basis, it can be suggested that *HTLGN* provides that 'potential space' for her to restore balance between the inner and outer world, and to accept her separation from her children by negotiating her body related ambivalences in relation to her experiences of the maternal. It is in this instant that I claim a positive postfeminist opportunity that manifests in the 'holding space' of *HTLGN*. The articulation of maternal ambivalence, as well as the despair and disappointment of motherhood, opens up a space of possibility and opportunity for the emotionally complicated experience of the maternal to be understood, explored and safely voiced.

Conscious experiences of maternal ambivalence are particularly difficult for mothers in our culture today. The result is that hateful feelings are internalised, resulting in persecutory guilt. For the postfeminist mother who accepts a 'hate-free image of motherhood' (Parker, 2005:95), silence becomes a conscious action to hide such ambivalent feelings. The desire to hide, as discussed above, gives rise to the emotional experience of shame and guilt. For Mollon (2008:31), 'shame is associated with whatever is outside the discourse, whatever cannot be spoken of'; therefore such negative feelings of being a mother are hidden behind the veil of silence in our culture today. From a psychoanalytic point of view Meyer Zeligs writes that:



[S]ilence serves to prevent the expression of inappropriate thoughts and feelings ... [and] to be silent means to be safe from others and from oneself. Silence isolates ... [and] serves to shut in one's inner thoughts and feelings [while] and at the same time shuts out the perception of external stimuli... This may be a voluntary act or it may be an unconscious protective process against any kind of threat, real or fantasied.

(Zeligs, 1961:9-10)

*HTLGN* provides a safe postfeminist space where the subjective experiences of 'maternal ambivalence' can be voiced, accepted and culturally acknowledged rather than ignored and suppressed. Such a comment underlines the programme's potential therapeutic quality as well as the development of a postfeminist capacity to recognise current emotional concerns about maternal subjectivity.

Gok Wan witnesses such maternal ambivalence as normal and understandable and considers such emotions part of the beauty of being a mother, allowing women to accept their emotional tribulations as well as to normalise them. By approaching the maternal body and the experience of being a mother with such appreciation and acceptance, he eradicates maternal ambivalence and this arguably alters the texture of postfeminist discourse.

The participants' voices in the programme become a channel of connection 'that bring the inner psyche world of feelings and thoughts out in the open air of relationships, where it can be heard by oneself and by people' (Brown & Gilligan, 1992:20). For female viewers, and especially for those who are mothers perhaps, such maternal confessions include the feeling that someone has arrived in your subjective space and allowed you to give voice to what might otherwise be subliminal and out of conscious awareness. Confessions of maternal subjective

experience within the makeover discourse of *HTLGN* result in the possibility of an emotional relatedness to maternal experiences, containment of these experiences and an articulation of familiarity. Such attributes potentially highlight the programme's postfeminist therapeutic qualities and point to emotionally significant dimensions of postfeminism that have not yet been widely discussed.

The mediated non-judgmental nature of Gok Wan is portrayed in the programme by acknowledging the m/other and/or her body as good enough. Taking Winnicott's concept of 'good-enough' and applying it to Gok Wan's account of the good-enough body, one can comment that such acknowledgement removes the female participant's illusionary mental representation of the perfect body, the perfect mother, the perfect woman. This is an illusionary perfection that has been established by popular media, celebrity culture and traditional cultural norms that lead ordinary women to reject their own bodily value. In addition, Gok Wan's acknowledgement of the subject's good-enough body instigates the makeover procedural process and therefore kick starts the (re)development of an identity.

Later on in my thesis and as part of my case study analysis, I will further scrutinise how the notion of 'good enough' generates a space where the creative self can begin as new and explore, (re)discover a new sense of subjectivity through the creative process of the makeover discourse. Moreover, I will psychoanalytically explore Gok Wan's affective use of his voice, tactility, touch and most importantly his reflective 'mirroring'. These constitute a motherly approach in his attempt to create a 'facilitating environment' (Winnicott, 1971), where his subject can feel emotionally supported during the overwhelming reflective moments of their

makeover process. Clearly, my case study analysis supports the usefulness of Winnicott's object relations theory, thus making its application pertinent for the exploration of those emotional investments and unconscious processes that transpire through the narratives and format of the makeover discourse, as well as through the relationship between Gok Wan and his female makeover subjects. It is to these questions that my thesis now turns.

## CHAPTER 4

### A psycho-cultural reading of *How To Look Good Naked*

This chapter sets out the first case study analysis of the *HTLGN* transformational process in a psycho-cultural attempt to signal the emotional and cultural value of the makeover format through the in-depth application of Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis. Drawing on textual and narrative aspects of the programme, this chapter explores the *HTLGN* object relating process that Gok Wan emotionally facilitates for his makeover participants in a cultural attempt to make sense of their body related experiences. Moreover, it demonstrates the way in which the expert playfully and creatively appropriates the setting for his female subjects, in order for them to explore, reflect upon and manage aspects of their self-experience and body-issues in a meaningful way that leads towards the attainment of self-knowledge. Drawing on Winnicott's ideas, and by psychoanalytically studying the interpersonal interaction between Gok Wan and his subjects, this chapter signals the format's therapeutic opportunity in assembling creative spaces where female subjective experiences in relation to the body can be interpreted and emotionally understood in a way that enriches notions of self and identity.<sup>21</sup>

Elements of play and creativity are at the heart of Gok Wan's makeover approach. The expert integrates playful techniques and stylistic practices as part of his makeover method to encourage his participant's emotional transformation of the

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<sup>21</sup> Here, it is important to highlight that a Kleinian reading follows as part of this case study analysis to psychoanalytically comment on the on-screen interaction between Gok Wan with his female participants.

self. This analysis showcases the way in which Gok Wan facilitates *HTLGN's* playful and creative process, where his subjects are able to make sense of their emotionally troubled experiences in relation to the body. This study argues that Gok Wan's methods entail a form of therapeutic playing, one that allows his participants to restore aspects of self in relation to the body and to gain an emotional awareness of these experiences that leads eventually to self-discovery and self-acceptance.

In the context of the playful experience of Gok Wan's approach, Winnicott's work and ideas are of cultural significance as they inform us of what is at stake emotionally for the participants during their transformational process and how their subjective experiences are shaped in a setting where emotions, play and creativity dominate the space. This psycho-cultural study of *HTLGN* will signal its cultural significance in shaping current feminine emotional experiences.

Current psycho-cultural work on media and cultural studies offered by the 'MiW' Network and its directors has revealed the psychoanalytic significance and relevance of applying object relations theory to the study of television and popular culture. Yates (2013:9) states that 'psychoanalysis has always had close ties with the culture and society in which it operates'. As the 'MiW' project maintains, the relationship between media studies and that of psychoanalysis has often been described as uneasy at best. As Bainbridge and Yates argue, in the past, the clinical application of psychoanalysis to theories of culture was widely used to explain and explore 'high' cultural artefacts, including classical novels, art and theatre, whereas popular culture has tended to be 'ignored' (Bainbridge & Yates 2012; Yates, 2012)

since the popular has often been perceived as a culture of ‘empty experiences ... [whilst] lacking the necessary depth of emotional work’ (Yates, 2013:12). In a similar vein, media academics have also been resistant to the use of psychoanalytic discourses, and such resistance is understood by Yates as a form of ‘mistrust’, which ‘stems partly from the perception that psychoanalytic theory is blind to issues of ideology, cultural differences and history ... [in moments] when media academics have applied psychoanalytic ideas to popular culture, these applications have often been underpinned by a strong political agenda’ (Yates, 2013:13). However, recent academic works demonstrate that psychoanalysis reveals cultural and social values where it is implemented (Bainbridge, Radstone, Rustin & Yates, 2007; Bainbridge & Yates, 2011; 2012; Bainbridge, Ward & Yates, 2013).

Popular culture is substantially concerned with feelings, passion and emotional release, and makeover programmes, as a form of popular culture, are shaped to emotionally intensify our experiences through reflexivity and expressivity ‘by the conjoining of emotion with thought’ (Richards, 2004: 342). Popular culture is best described by Richards as ‘therapeutic’ since it is more concerned with the management of feelings rather than with their expression. Popular culture is far from being just a space of empty experience, since in its positive forms it has opened up spaces for reflexivity and emotional release, thus enabling the potential of working through experience. As previously discussed, the concept of ‘therapeutic’ is important in shaping my discussion on makeover television, and

the notion of ‘working through’<sup>22</sup>, which is taken from the clinical practice of psychotherapy, can usefully inform an understanding of the place of emotional experience in contemporary popular culture, since emphasis is placed upon the expression of feelings and their management.

It has been argued that the *HTLGN* makeover framework provides a useful opening to negotiate a therapeutic opportunity offered for ordinary women to emotionally express their feminine troubles and feelingful states in relation to the body. As Chapter 3 has already outlined, *HTLGN* creates a postfeminist space where ‘naked’ maternal ambivalences find emotional expression. They are considered emotionally significant and an integral part of feminine experience that no longer needs to remain silent but, rather needs to become culturally recognised. Therefore, it can be argued that popular makeover formats reveal a capacity to offer a cultural framework in which ordinary women can safely and uncritically negotiate aspects of their feminine experiences and emotionally restore the relationship with their bodies in a meaningful and constructive way.

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<sup>22</sup> Freud’s concept of ‘working through’ has no precise definition and thus it is one of Freud’s most ambiguous concepts. However, in his 1914 paper, Freud states that ‘Remembering’, ‘Repeating’ and ‘Working Through’ are three concepts central to the patients’ analytic experiences. Freud writes that in the analytic process the patient is ‘working’ towards overcoming traumatic experiences that are often repressed in the unconscious mind and thus often described by the patient as ‘forgotten’, especially when s/he adds ‘As a matter of fact I’ve always known it; only I’ve never thought of it’ (148). Freud then adds that a certain kind of patient ‘does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it’ (Freud, 1914:150). According to Freud, where there is repetition, there was repression; and where there was repression, there was trauma. In the analytic process, Freud adds that ‘one must allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to *work through* it, to overcome it ... Only when the resistance is at its height can the analyst, working in common with his patient, discover the repressed instinctual impulses which are feeding the resistance and it is this kind of experience which convinces the patient of the existence and power of such impulses (1914:151). When Freud talks about the ‘working through’ process and ‘overcoming’, resistances he does not mean simply mean putting behind but is more about coming to a realisation.

Drawing on Richards' theoretical framework, my work considers Gok Wan's makeover formula as a positive form of popular culture, as it offers opportunities for its female subjects to emotionally explore and reflect on aspects of their self-experiences in relation to the body that can lead to self-awareness and self-discovery. Drawing on Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis, this case study will address the visual and textual aspects of the makeover's transformational process that reveal a sequence by which the subject's object relations are restored in a playful and creative way within a facilitating space offered by Gok Wan. This analysis addresses the thesis' aim on how the popular makeover format constitutes a form of what Winnicott describes as 'cultural experience'.

### **Winnicott's object sequence: The creative *capacity* for object-use**

The focus of object relations psychoanalysis is the unconscious relationship that exists between a subject and his/her objects, both internal and external. In the British object relations tradition, the notion of the 'object' refers to 'our profound need for a sense of relatedness and how the mind works to internalise the objects of our emotional experiences so that this relatedness can be sustained even when we are separated from others in the external world' (Bainbridge, 2011:36). As I outlined in Chapter 3, Klein's work informs us that objects play a significant role in the emotional development of a subject and can be either part-objects, like the breast, or whole-objects, like the mother. For Klein, it is the experience of separation from the first object, the breast, that determines all later experiences. Following on from and also developing aspects of Klein's work, Winnicott



introduced the idea of a ‘transitional’ object, related to, but distinct from, both the external object, the mother’s breast and the internal object, the introjected breast.

For Winnicott, our relation to the object is central to the human capacity for creativity. The word *creativity*, according to Winnicott, ‘describes ordinary living; the doing that arises out of being. It is the coloring of the whole attitude toward reality, in which the individual experiences himself as being both alive and real’ (Posner et al., 2001:172). This is central to understanding the way in which the makeover setting is arranged and how it enables the subject to engage creatively with all aspects of her personality and identity and thus make sense of her self-expertise.

What is central to the *HTLGN* setting, is Winnicott’s ideas about what he called the ‘intermediate area of experience’ between the ‘subjective object’<sup>23</sup> and the ‘objectively perceived object’<sup>24</sup> and the interactions of the infant with its environment, as well as the infant’s experience of those interactions. It is within this intermediate space where the infant begins to experience the capacity to imagine, to play and create new meanings. The intermediate space is the space of illusion. From birth, Winnicott suggests:

The human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived ... *The intermediate area to which I am referring is the area that is allowed to the infant between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality testing.* The transitional phenomena represent the early stages

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<sup>23</sup> The term ‘subjective object’ describes ‘the first object, the object *not yet repudiated as not-me phenomenon*’ (Winnicott, 1971:80, italics in original).

<sup>24</sup> Balik (2014:162) writes that ‘These phrases are rather problematic, since it is clear that another subject is never wholly “objectively” perceived.’

of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being.

(Winnicott, 1971:11, italics in original)

Winnicott identifies this intermediate area of experience as constituting the greater part of the infant's experience and it is retained throughout life, 'in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work' (1971:14). Winnicott's (1971: 3) idea is the *transition* from a relationship with a subjective object, to a relationship in which the individual recognises and relates to the object as an 'other-than-me' entity. Transitional phenomena constitute the 'root of symbolism' and describe the beginning of the infant's journey 'from the purely subjective to objectivity' (Winnicott, 1971:6) whereas the capacity to symbolise implies the ability to 'distinguish between fact and phantasy, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perceptions' (ibid). This concept of *transition* is essential when considering the object relating psychoanalytic significance of Gok Wan's procedural process, challenges and 'object-use', and how all these affectively assist the emotional transformation of their body related experiences.

For an object to be conceived of as being 'transitional', it relies on the individual's capacity to begin conceiving 'the external world as external; that is, outside of the subject' (Perlow, 1995:94). The transitional object is considered the infant's 'first possession', which in this context stands for the breast, and as a metaphor, also stands in for the 'mother'. At this stage the object is no longer part of the individual, although it still belongs to 'not-me' possession (Winnicott, 1971:1). The transitional object indicates the function of the infant's relationship to his mother

as well as the process of separating from her. For Winnicott, the role of the ‘good-enough’ mother is utterly important here, because she allows the infant’s successful transition from subjective object type to an objectively perceived object:

I have introduced the terms “transitional objects” and “transitional phenomena” for designation of the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral eroticism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness (‘Say: “ta” ’). (Winnicott, 1971:2)

The transitional object is a symbol: ‘an aspect of the infant’s experience of his environment and ... indicates a stage of development from object-relating to “use of an object”’ (Abram, 2007:343). Winnicott, (1971:89), in his paper on ‘The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications’, states that an essential feature in the concept of transitional object ‘*is the paradox and the acceptance of the paradox*’ (italics in original). Here, the baby creates the object but the object was already there waiting to be created. For Winnicott, one must develop the *capacity* to use an object, and this capacity cannot be taken for granted. The capacity to use an object is dependent on the creation of a facilitating environment. Winnicott (1971:89) comments that ‘in the sequence one can say that first there is object-relating, then in the end there is object-use; in between, however, is the most difficult thing, perhaps, in human development’.

At the beginning, the infant experiences only the subjective object and moves gradually, enabled by transitional experience, through object relating to object usage. Transitional experience takes place in the space where illusion exists and it

is a space where the baby creates the world. This space belongs to ‘neither internal or external reality ... it is the place that both connects and separates [the] inner and outer’ (Abram, 2007:337). In that moment the baby has not yet differentiated itself as a separate entity from the mother. It is on the border between the beginning of inner life and the beginning to recognise external reality. According to Winnicott, object relating involves a projective mechanism; the object is experienced, but not yet perceived as wholly other. However, object usage involves ‘the acceptance of the object’s independent existence, its property of having been there all the time’ (Winnicott, 1971:88). The object must be objectively perceived and must belong to shared reality. Winnicott describes the process as follows:

After ‘subject relates to object’ comes ‘subject destroys object’ (as it becomes external); and then may come ‘*object survives* destruction by the subject’ ... From now on the subject says: ‘Hullo object!’ ‘I destroyed you.’ ‘I love you.’ ‘You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you.’ ‘While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*.’ (Winnicott, 1971:90, italics in original)

The survival, then, of the object indicates that the child now can safely use the object. The object now has value and meaning for the infant, because it has survived; it has its own life. For Winnicott, object usage entails the destruction of the object in fantasy and its survival in reality. The destruction of the object in ‘(unconscious) *fantasy*’ plays an important part in creating a perceived reality and through that the child develops the capacity to experience the limits of his control, while at the same time he ‘arrives at the realisation that the object is wholly other, outside his (subject’s) boundaries’ (Posner, et al. 2001:179). Importantly, Winnicott (1971:93) states, ‘Although destruction is the word I am using, this

actual destruction belongs to the object's failure to survive. Without this failure, destruction remains potential. The word destruction is needed, not because of the subject's impulse to destroy, but because of the object's liability not to survive'. What is significant here for Winnicott is that the destruction and survival lead to the recognition of reality (which is the place where the object has survived) and the distinction between the internal and external object. Winnicott (1971:93) states that '*there is no anger* in the destruction of the object' but there is a joyful awareness at the survival of the object and its resistances. From this moment onwards 'the object is *in fantasy* always being destroyed. This quality of "always being destroyed" makes the reality of the surviving object felt as such, strengthens the feeling tone, and contributes to object-constancy. The object can now be used.'

For Winnicott, the destruction of the object is an achievement, since the child has risked the aggressiveness and has experienced the survival of the object, with its implication of constant love and, being able to contain the destruction *in fantasy*, the child is able to tolerate the ambivalences and the acceptance of personal aggressiveness. Winnicott (1971:126) perceived the process of object usage not as 'exploitation' of the object but rather the development of creative potential. The relationship with the object (which simultaneously can be destroyed in fantasy and survive in reality) allows for the individual/child to be creative and to experience both his own authenticity and that of the object. The capacity to use the object signals the capacity for living creatively as a separate being.

Winnicott's (1974) distinction between 'object-relating' and 'object-usage' is relevant here as this process contributes to our understanding of a 'transitional object'. For Winnicott (1953) transitional objects, transitional phenomena and transitional space are fundamental to the subject's negotiation of individual identity and separation from the mother.

For Bainbridge:

They [transitional objects] also constitute the first experience of symbol-making and are therefore linked to our capacity for playfulness, thought and creativity. Hence, it is in the spheres of art, culture and religion that our childhood capacity for play and creativity finds an outlet in adult life. Such spaces provide for experience that unites the inner and outer worlds, allowing us to live out a profound sense of enrichment that is uniquely personal and unable to be challenged by others. For Winnicott, therapy is just such a transitional space and requires a capacity for play and creativity in order to be effective.

(Bainbridge, 2013a:51)

For Winnicott, the great precursor to creativity is the ability to play and he believes it is important for adults to maintain the act of playfulness throughout their lives. This ability to play forms the beginnings of creative living which opens up the space of cultural experience. Winnicott (1971:100) sees a logical connection between transitional objects and transitional phenomena, playing, creativity and the creative, cultural experience of human beings in society, and he writes that: 'The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play'.

Winnicott (1971) believes that play is the necessary start to a creative and fulfilling life. Playful and creative experiences constitute an important method and approach in the therapeutic work of adults and children. He states that ‘It is play that is the universal, and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health’ (41). By developing the ability to play and only through playing the individual child/adult is able to be creative and to use his/her whole personality, because ‘it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self’ (Winnicott, 1971: 54).

Here, it is important to investigate how Winnicott’s theoretical ideas can enable us to demonstrate the object relating significance of media and more specifically how television can be read as an ‘object’ that survives all efforts of our ‘destruction’ and thus enriches our inner world since it has the capacity to shape our emotional subjective experience and sense of selfhood. This discussion is pertinent in emphasising how my work departs from Silverstone’s (1994) work on television in the textual analysis of makeover television and the way in which the procedural process of Gok Wan’s approach serves as a form of cultural experience for the participants and viewers by extension.

Drawing on Winnicott’s ideas, Silverstone (1994:12) argues that television contributes to the production of our identity formation and capacity for symbol formation, thus offering us security ‘within a challenging world of self and others’. He states that,

The space it occupied is filled with other cultural activities and forms which continue the work of providing relief from the

strain of relating inner and outer reality [...]. The cultural work continues with its consequent satisfactions and frustrations, and with the continuing reliance on objects and media to facilitate it. [...] Our media, television perhaps pre-eminently, occupy the potential space released by blankets, teddy bears and breasts and functions cathectically and culturally as transitional objects. (Silverstone, 1994:12-13)

Silverstone's critical view of television as a 'transitional object' reveals television's significant role in enabling its viewers to deal with the uncertainties and emotional dilemmas of everyday life. The availability of playful and creative experiences that media, and television in particular, offer for us to engage, challenge and even disagree with, contributes to the formation of our subjective experience of the self and can be used socially and symbolically to facilitate an important and potentially therapeutic space of working through.

It is in this respect that Silverstone's work is pertinent for the development on makeover television. As previously remarked, I will extend Silverstone's work, as my own research has allowed me to identify the potential of the makeover programme *HTLGN* as an 'intermediate' form of cultural experience, thus allowing me to investigate its emotional significance and its potentially therapeutic quality for the makeover participants who partake in the process and for viewers of the show by extension.

It is my view that the procedural format of the *HTLGN* experience opens up the space where it (re)introduces the importance of object-relating and use of objects, and it reveals a creative process which parallels that of Winnicott's procedural sequence of his object relations model. What is more, it demonstrates how elements



of playing and creativity are facilitated within the makeover space, which in turn allows the participants to negotiate aspects of their self and identity, and to gain a deeper emotional understanding of their subjective experience in relation to their bodies. The reflective space that opens up as part of the makeover production, and the emphasis on emotions, initiates the foundation of the process described by Winnicott that contributes to object development. Therefore, using Silverstone's work as a starting point, I will extend his critical ideas on television by applying Winnicott's key theoretical concepts to an in-depth study of the textual and formal aspects of the programme under scrutiny here.

### **Reading *How To Look Good Naked* through object relations**

*HTLGN* centres on the significance of emotion and considers the psychological mechanisms of self-reflection, an important feature of the makeover practice. For Gok Wan, the way in which the female participants emotionally perceive their own body imperfections, as well as how they undervalue their self-worth, is what the programme considers important and in need of modifying. Hence, the focus of the programme is not surgically preoccupied with fixing the body like shows such as *10 Years Younger* or *Extreme Makeover*, but, rather, it is more concerned with modifying the troublesome emotional relationship that one has with one's own body and psyche.

In the next section, I will present two distinct *HTLGN* makeover cases. In both of these, the creative dimension of the makeover procedural phase reveals an object relating process that allows me to consider how *HTLGN* offers its subjects a

makeover journey that is both emotionally constructive and significant. Such a makeover opportunity reveals a capacity to enrich the participants' emotional subjective experience and facilitates self-growth. Such a reading allows me to psychoanalytically explore my hypothesis that *HTLGN*'s method creates, for its subjects, a space that Winnicott's defines as 'cultural experience'. To do this, I will provide an extended description of the two cases separately and will present key moments and elements of the programme's format, style and texture. In what follows, I analyse key elements and ideas by weaving through Winnicott's theoretical framework to reveal this 'object relating' process. It is this process that in my view constitutes the emotional significance of the makeover process in opening up playful and creative spaces, where notions of selfhood and aspects of the feminine self can be explored, expressed, and emotionally understood, all of which affirm the program's therapeutic potential to offer a 'constructive' postfeminist experience to its subjects and viewers as their extension.

#### *How To Look Good Naked: The case of Leanne*

*HTLGN* provides a potential space for 'maximally intense experiences' (Winnicott, 1971:100), where female participants are able to fantasise, imagine, dream, and play as well to create new meanings and make new discoveries about themselves. Leanne (Series 2, Episode 6), aged 27, lacks body confidence and hates her legs and the naked sight of them to such an extent that she wears tights all year around to cover them up, even during the sunny summer period. In her makeover introduction, Leanne reveals:

**Leanne's (voiceover):** My bum and thighs - I describe them as they're one, because my bum starts before my legs can finish ... I will not let ... [my husband] see me naked, or see me in my underwear. On the odd occasion, we do have sex, I have these special tights that I wear. The tights are sort of my comfort zone. If I cannot see what is on my legs, it makes me I feel better. What is out of sight is out of mind then ... I hate the way I look ...!

As part of the makeover format of the programme, Gok Wan recognises the importance of the participant's personal accounts of her own body both symbolically and physically as a key aspect of the makeover process. Once Leanne's body related concern has been addressed, she is invited to enter into the reflective space (which is both the literal room of mirrors and psychic space of consideration) of the *HTLGN* studio, which is where Gok Wan waits and welcomes her in with a friendly handshake.



*Figure 17: Gok Wan welcomes Leanne*

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** This is definitely going to be tough. I have to get Leanne to peel off those tights and peel away her perceptions about her legs.

**Gok Wan:** What do you want to see when you look in the mirror?

**Leanne:** Something nice to look at, something pretty ...  
Sorry... (SOBS)

**Gok Wan:** Just let it go – that's fine.

*Leanne nods and relaxes.*

...

**Gok Wan:** What we're going to do now is, we're going to take your clothes off, but I want you to leave your tights on for now.

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** I am going to take it just one step at a time.

Leanne takes her clothes off and Gok Wan stands right behind her and offers her support and reassurance by holding her from her shoulders. Leanne stares at her own naked reflection and looks upset:

**Gok Wan:** When was the last time you looked at yourself like this in a full-length mirror?

**Leanne:** Too long to remember.



*Figure 18: Leanne's mirrors wearing her tights*

Leanne looks at her 360-degree body reflection while still wearing her tights. A moment later, Gok Wan tells Leanne that it is important to remove her tights now in order to have a chance to see properly her body and most importantly her legs. As Leanne's introductory reflections reveal, she has not seen her legs in five years. Since this makeover moment is quite an overwhelming experience for Leanne, Gok Wan acknowledges this clearly and he advises her to remove her tights only when she feels ready:



*Figure 19: Leanne's mirrors without the tights*

**Gok Wan:** How does it feel to have those tights off?

**Leanne:** Just horrible to look at! The hips are huge. My bum is huge. There's all stretch-marks on my legs, I have got scars on this leg. I feel really naked. I do not feel like an attractive woman.



*Figure 20: Gok Wan's caring response and promise to  
Leanne*

**Gok Wan:** Let me tell you what I see in the mirror. I am not going to lie to you! I promise I will not lie to you.

**Leanne:** Ok.

**Gok Wan:** Your legs – Ok, so you are a bit of a pear shape, its fine. Most women in the UK are bit of a pear shape. In fact, that makes you very beautiful, but what you must do, is to start looking in the mirror and be really honest with yourself, because you are lying to yourself more than anybody else - Alright?

**Leanne:** OK!

**Gok Wan:** Give us a kiss.

**Leanne:** Thank you.

**Gok Wan:** You are welcome.

In the safe holding space of *HTLGN*, Gok Wan is embracing a role that we might compare to Winnicott's concept of the 'good enough' m/other. For Winnicott (1953) the 'good-enough' mother offers cares and comfort to her infant and creates a 'holding environment' to adapt to the infant's emotional and physical needs. The 'good enough' mother starts by making a complete adaptation to her infant needs by being emotionally attuned to its emotions and being able to tolerate the infant's frustrations during overwhelming moments of physical and emotional distress. These characteristics of the Winnicottian 'good-enough' mother manifest themselves through Gok Wan's affective gaze that he adopts during this overwhelming makeover moment of his subjects. Such an affective response on his part is suggestive of his emotional attunement to and sensitivity towards his

subject's fragile emotional state, while at the same time he is handling and holding their emotional anxieties.

A key role of the 'good-enough' mother is that she 'meets the omnipotence of the infant and to some extent makes sense of it. She does this repeatedly. A True Self begins to have life, through the strength given to the infant's weak ego by the mother's implementation of omnipotent expressions '(Winnicott, 1957:145). By 'True Self', Winnicott is referring to that 'authentic identity with which the child is born. When acknowledged, received, and responded to by the mother, the child's 'True Self' is confirmed and given meaning. Over time, this nurturance contributes to the further development of the individual's authentic and integrated sense of self (Daehnert, 1958:258). The Winnicottian account of the 'good-enough' m/other in this instance is symbolically represented through the holding and devoted figure of Gok Wan, who has the ability to grasp and take into himself something of the subject's anxieties and therefore can reflect on the participant's emotionally painful experiences in his own way without being overwhelmed by them.

Extending this, we could also argue that even though the latter claim recognises Gok Wan's good enough motherly stance towards his subject's emotional responses, it also reveals an unconscious process described as the phenomenon of 'transference'. Transference is a concept derived from psychoanalysis and Freud used the term 'transference' in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895/1955). However, it took him years to understand and formulate that phenomenon (Freud, 1912a). The term transference pertains to '[t]he displacement [or transfer] of patterns of feelings, thoughts and behaviour originally experienced in relation to significant figures [i.e.



parents, siblings, teachers] during childhood onto a person involved in a current interpersonal relationship' (Fine & Moore, 1990:196). From the contemporary psychoanalytic viewpoint, the experience of transference derives from the interpersonal relationship of the patient with the analyst and transference 'account[s] for everything that happen[s] in the session' (Fayek, 2011:200).

Bernard Fine and Burness Moore comment that:

Since the process involved is largely unconscious, the patient does not perceive the various sources of transference attitudes, fantasies and feelings (such as love, hate and anger). The phenomenon appears unbidden from the point of view of the subject and is at times distressing. Parents are usually the original figures from whom such emotional patterns are displaced, however siblings, grandparents, teachers, physicians and childhood heroes also act as frequent sources. Transference is a type of object relationship, and insofar as every object relationship is a re-editing of the first childhood attachment, transference is ubiquitous. (Fine & Moore, 1990: 169-167)

In the *HTLGN* framework and through the interpersonal relationship and interaction between Gok Wan and his female subjects, it is evident that the unconscious mechanism of 'transference' is at play. Gok Wan, through his 'motherly' stance, transfers in Leanne's case his own definitions and associations that stem from her body related anxieties, in an attempt to comfort her and offer emotional relief before she undergoes the full transformational process that would allow her to arrive at her own interpretation of these emotional experiences.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Gok Wan's stance is highly problematic, especially when we consider his role in embracing the characteristics associated with that of therapist. In the analytic setting, a trained therapist must allow space

for the patient/analysand to arrive at his/her own interpretation and reach the emotional maturity that would enable them to make sense of their experiences and therefore relieve themselves of their emotional concerns. However, Gok Wan's depiction offers his own interpretation of his female participants in a motherly attempt to comfort the subject. This makeover situation raises then the question/problem of 'counter-transference' in the *HTLGN* setting. To understand such a concern further, one must turn to psychoanalytic discussion and theories on the problem of 'counter-transference' in the analytic setting.

The classical conception of counter-transference was originated by Freud (1910) and was stated most forcefully many years ago by Annie Reich (1951, 1960). Counter-transference is conceptualised as 'the therapist's largely unconscious, conflict-based reactions to the patient's transference. In this sense, countertransference may be seen as the therapist's transference to the patient's transference' (Gelso & Hayes, 2007:5). As the authors have discussed elsewhere (Gelso & Hayes, 2002) in counter-transference, the unresolved conflicts originating in the therapist's early childhood are triggered by the patient's transference.

Therefore, the therapist/analyst's training and self-analysis are crucial in eliminating the manifestation of counter-transference. The importance of this was emphasised by Freud (1912b) in his paper 'Recommendation of physicians practising psychoanalysis', where he stressed that the basic ground rule of psychoanalytic therapy (a rule that applies also in psychotherapy) is the ability of the analyst to study themselves and their own reaction to the patients, to penetrate

into their own unconscious minds in order to be able to understand the inner working of their patients. According to Freud's writings then, therapists need to study and understand themselves deeply and use this understanding in order to understand their patients deeply. Freud made a direct reference to counter-transference when he indicated:

We have begun to consider the "counter-transference," which arises in the physician as a result of the patient's influence on his [the physician's] unconscious feelings, and have nearly come to the point of requiring the physician to recognize and overcome this counter-transference in himself ... [E]very analyst's achievement is limited by what his own complexes and resistances permit, and consequently we require that he should begin his practice with a self-analysis and should extend and deepen this constantly while making his observations of his patients. (Freud, 1910: 144-145)

Drawing on Freud's work, Charles Gelso and Jeffrey Hayes (2007:3) argue that the 'therapist must perform a self-analysis and he must "extend and deepen this constantly"' since, as Freud implies, it is an ongoing process. Therefore, in order for the therapist's role and work to be effective, one must come to grips with and resolve one's own complexes and resistances. In his famous Surgeon's Quote, Freud (1912b:115) tells us, 'I cannot recommend my colleagues emphatically enough to take as a model in psycho-analytic treatment the surgeon who puts aside all his own feelings, including that of human sympathy, and concentrates his mind on one single purpose, that of performing the operation as skill-fully as possible'. In response to Freud's quote, Gelso and Hayes (2007:4) comment 'that not only must analysts eliminate their countertransference, but they should also put aside all of their feelings in order to do effective work'

As previously mentioned, it is widely documented through Gok Wan's popular media platforms that he has encountered his own personal body related struggles with being overweight as well as having experienced eating disorders. In the following chapter, I offer a psychoanalytic account of Gok Wan's charismatic persona and comment on how his 'unresolved' body related concerns penetrate the makeover setting and become the basis on which he offers his own interpretation towards his subject's body related emotional concerns, which in turn problematises the culturally stereotypical position of Gok Wan as that of a therapist. However, later on in this chapter, I will negotiate the cultural function of Gok Wan as a 'transformational' agent based on the 'holding environment' he appropriates for his female subjects to reflectively make sense of their body dilemmas and reach new emotional definitions of their inner subjective experiences.

Through this analytic discussion with regard to the interpersonal relationship between Gok Wan (the expert) and the female protagonist, and the experience of the unconscious phenomena of 'transference' and 'counter-transference', it is important to consider the role of the spectator in the self-reflective process. As suggested since the beginning of the thesis, I position the viewer's experience as an emotional extension of that of the female protagonist.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the female participants (in the makeover show) develop into 'emotional representatives' who negotiate their current feminine struggles in relation to the body. The negotiation of these experiences through the reflective interaction with the expert, allows the viewers as analysts/spectators to re-

experience past relations and past emotions as part of their feminine struggles. The interaction between Gok Wan and the female participants exposes various interpretations of these female struggles to the female viewers. The spectator's re-experience of past emotions induces a counter-transference, an identification of the spectator with the female protagonists, which allows the viewer to recognise the experience of the protagonist as their own. This position allows the viewers to negotiate aspects of the feminine subjectivity in a symbolic parallel with the protagonists. This assertion is central to negotiating the extent to which the makeover format constitutes a form of 'cultural experience' for the female subject and the viewers as their emotional extensions.

Drawing on the 'good enough' motherly discussion, it is important to note that such emotional holding, which becomes available through Gok Wan's presence, reveals his capacity to contain his subject's 'messy' and overwhelming feelings, which can prevent the female subjects from having the capacity for relationships, emotional growth and learning. His ability to withstand this allows the space of *HTLGN* to be seen as generating a 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1960b) for his female subjects. As discussed in Chapter 3, *HTLGN* opens up a 'holding environment', which enables the subjects' painful feelings and anxieties towards their own bodies to be contained, understood and potentially worked through during their makeover procedure.

Winnicott argues that 'the emergence of the individual is a process involving both social and symbolic dimensions, substantially grounded in the experience of space and time' (Silverstone, 1994:9). In the example highlighted at the outset of this

chapter, it is through the holding space of *HTLGN* and the facilitating environment provided by Gok Wan's 'good enough' motherly approach to Leanne's emotional needs, that her state of 'absolute dependence' (Winnicott, 1963a:84) is revealed. In such emotional moments it is both the psychical and the physical environment which make possible a steady progress towards maturation, or at best enables the makeover participant to gain an emotional understanding of her body related experiences, which in turn allows her to make sense of them in a meaningful and constructive way.

During the participant's state of absolute dependence, the role of Gok Wan is again vital, since he sets off the unfolding of Leanne's potentialities as well as the development of a stronger sense of a self and self-understanding. The self develops as a result of the quality of 'mothering' that the subject receives, as in the case of Gok Wan who understands and responds to Leanne's 'spontaneous gestures' and gives her weak ego the necessary strength to retain the expression of the true self, thus creating opportunities for her to transition from the state of 'absolute dependence' to autonomy and independence. This outcome is achieved through the maturation process of the self through the operation of self-reflective tasks and object-relating. The state of 'absolute dependence' on Gok Wan indicates also the subject's level of trust invested in him, a trust that is gained through Gok Wan's expressive capacity to empathise with his subject's anxieties. In the case of Leanne, her trust towards Gok Wan is revealed through her willingness to remove her security object, her tights, thus allowing herself to feel vulnerable in his presence. The emotional holding that Gok Wan provides in the makeover space becomes an indicator of the trust that he initiates with his subject. The notion of trust constitutes

an important element during the makeover development of the subject, since it signals also the commencing of creative subjective experience, illusion and play, leading to the tremendous potential of building self-stability and the opportunity for self-discovery. In the next extract, I will reveal how the notions of play/playfulness, creativity and humour transpire during a makeover moment that not only enhances the communication and trust between Gok Wan and his subjects but also enables the subject to tolerate and manage feelings of frustration and anxiety:

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** With the help of husband Lee, I have taken secret delivery of Leanne's underwear drawer.



*Figure 21: Gok Wan reveals to Leanne her underwear draw*

**Leanne:** ... I am gonna kill him (laughing and giggling) – these are my knickers!!!!

*Gok Wan opens the first drawer that is packed with Leanne's tights.*

**Gok Wan:** OK... Obviously, the tights, as well! A complete abundance.

**Leanne:** They're my special tights (giggling)

**Gok Wan:** Are these ... your sex tights?

*Gok Wan makes a funny face.*



*Figure 22: Leanne laughs at Gok Wan's reaction of her special tights*

**Leanne:** My sex tights, yeah. This is what I wear ... Don't get me to model them now (laughing and giggling).

**Gok Wan:** No, do not worry, I am not going to...

...

**Gok Wan** (while holding a dozen pairs of Leanne's old tights): These have got to go.



Now Gok Wan takes Leanne into the procedural phase of her makeover, which involves a playful yet emotionally challenging experience for the female subject.

*Gok Wan hangs the tights on a rope across a white room and her task here is to convince Gok Wan – who is holding a pair of large scissors with both hands - not to shred them into pieces. Leanne is giggling while holding up the one end of the rope while the other end is secured somewhere in the makeover space behind Gok Wan (Figure 23).*



*Figure 23: Cutting the tights challenge*

**Gok Wan:** Tell me my love! Why should you keep the tights?

Give me a good reason and I will not cut them up.

**Leanne:** You cannot.

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** I have to get Leanne out of those tights forever ...

Time for a bit of ‘Gok therapy’.



*Figure 24: Gok Wan about to cut Leanne's tights*

**Leanne:** Don't cut the tights. (Giggles)

**Gok Wan:** Come on! (Smiling)



*Figure 25: Gok Wan cuts Leanne's tights*

**Leanne:** Do not cut my tights! Do not cut my tights! (Laughing and giggling)

**Gok Wan:** Why I am not allowed to cut your tights, gorgeous?

**Leanne:** Because I need my tights.

**Gok Wan:** But don't you think this is a therapy whatsoever?

**Leanne:** It is a hard therapy. (tears up)

...

*Gok Wan walks immediately closer to Leanne and offers her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Gok seats down and Leanne hugs him more tightly while she is confessing again and again in tears:*



*Figure 26: Leanne hugs tightly Gok Wan and cries on shoulder*

**Leanne (sobs intensely):** I don't want to wear the tights, I don't want to wear the tights in the summer, I don't want to wear the tights, but I have to wear them!

Throughout the makeover process, Gok Wan maintains an emotional holding environment for his female subjects, that allows them to feel comforted during the overwhelming process in facing the challenges and exercises that he sets up for them. The holding environment develops into a symbolic space, where play, humour as well as affectionate kinds of teasing can be used effectively to learn about one's feelings and experiences. Affective use of humour can minimise anxiety and have a self-reflective and interpretive function. In the analytic situation, Darlene Ehrenberg informs us that:

[Playfulness and humour] can be catalytic in enabling the patients to have a new experience in relation to oneself, or a new experience of intimacy in relation to another, and can become the basis for experimentation and exploration as they provide an opportunity for the discovery of undeveloped resources. Often their value lies precisely in the kind of new affective experience they can help generate.  
(Ehrenberg, 1991:225)

It is through humour and playfulness that one can 'discover their own ability to deal with frustration or disappointment. These experiences of self-discovery can become a source of pride and expanding self-esteem' (Ehrenberg, 1991: 225). Once again, the role of the 'good-enough' mother is pertinent here. According to Winnicott, the mother's capacity to be attuned and sensitive to her infant needs is central to the dyad relationship of mother and infant. The mother's capacity to allow the infant to experience frustration in a gradual way allows the infant to tolerate these feelings and experience them as part of its emotional development. The experience of tolerating these emotions leads to an emotional maturity, where the infant begins to make sense of these feelings, which leads to acquiring self-

knowledge and an inner sense of self-understanding. In the makeover case, Gok Wan's challenge to cut the tights with the scissors in Leanne's presence is a gradual attempt to help his subject deal with the frustration of losing or not wearing her tights. Even though it is an overwhelming challenge, Gok Wan's approach allows Leanne to experience these feelings for first time, feelings that previously might have been unbearable to think or emotionally contemplate. Emotionally engaging in that challenge, Leanne can begin to gain inner self-understanding of the emotions invested in them. This is an important *HTLGN* step that leads towards self-discovery and self-understanding.

On the flip side, one could argue that the cutting of Leanne's tights is an emotionally violent act imposed by Gok Wan, since his 'playful' ferocity in destroying her tights causes her to experience messy and unbearable emotional states that bring her to tears (Figure 26). However, it is Gok Wan's holding maternal function that makes these violent and destructive experiences bearable, since in the sight of Leanne's upset, Gok Wan walks over and offers her a hug, thus allowing her the space to emotionally express and reflect on her body frustration which generates for her 'the condition of possibility' (Gordon, 2007).

Gok Wan's somewhat violent act of destroying Leanne's tights enables her to emotionally express and articulate her hidden and silent anguish of wearing tights as means of concealing her body-discontent. This claim is evident through Leanne's narratives, where she repeatedly confesses in tears and with emotional intensity: 'I don't want to wear the tights'. Admitting and realising these messy, feelingful states and body related frustration are an important process of Gok

Wan's makeover approach. The playful exchanges during Leanne's makeover procedural process allow her to discover that she is indeed able to tolerate frustration and can recognise how her tights really make her feel. The playful and humorous aspects of this challenge ease the experience for Leanne to face and deal with emotions that previously would have never been dealt with.

As Winnicott's theory informs us, the child's capacity to 'use the object', comes out of its growing ability to destroy it, and 'play' is an all-important thing that a child does, because it is through play that the child learns to engage with its first 'not me' possession. Playing is fun, playing is exciting, and through playing one can gain awareness of a more authentic emotional self as well as embracing a true sense of being. According to object relations theory, play provides opportunities for the infant/child/adult to explore those parts of himself or herself that were previously hidden (Winnicott, 1971). It is through play that Gok Wan attempts to experiment and to challenge Leanne emotionally and psychologically about her obsession with wearing tights. For Winnicott, therapy is just a transitional space that provides capacity for play and creativity to develop in order to be more effective.

By bringing Leanne's cabinet drawer into the studio/space, Gok Wan generates a more intimate familiarity with her, since the drawer becomes an instant representation of her bedroom; a private space filled with her most intimate possessions, and hence filled with hidden emotional connotations about her identity. Consequently, the makeover space becomes a 'third area', where Gok Wan enters into Leanne's most intimate space without intruding or violating it.

Through the use of added humour, such an entry develops into a more playful experience that allows for new discoveries to be made and anxieties to be identified. By creating a level of intimacy and familiarity within that space, Gok Wan opens one drawer at a time and through this action, he symptomatically unveils hidden aspects of Leanne's personality and opens up a space for her to reflect on certain aspects of her inner self. Through these playful psychological tasks, Gok Wan recreates the 'freedom of a playroom' (Lemma, 2000:70), which originates, according to Winnicott (1971), in that intermediate area of experience that lies between fantasy and reality. Within that 'humorous space', (Lemma, 2000:70), the subject feels safe and emotionally relaxed enough to face and admit to hidden parts of the self. For instance, it is this playful instance where Leanne tackles her anxieties and directly taps into them through her emotional admission that she does not want to wear her tights. This is an emotional opportunity that would have been challenging outside the playful discourses with Gok Wan, as the subject may experience a sense of fear in facing, let alone voicing, such emotions.

Therefore, it is through playfulness that Gok Wan engages with his subject and that moments of self-realisation transpire and, for his subject, painful aspects of former experience are acknowledged and recognised. At the same time, working through practices begin to become available for the participant.

#### *The tights are ... my comfort zone*

For Leanne, her tights are not just a piece of clothing that she is wearing to hide her bodily insecurities, but they serve a much deeper role in her life, as they hold

the function of a 'transitional object'. For Winnicott (1953) 'transitional objects' are the infant's 'first not-me possessions' like a blanket or doll. 'They are tangible - can be held onto, grasped, hugged. They lessen the stress of separation and soothe the infant' (Delgado, et al. 2015:28). The transitional object successfully affords separation from others, and people use them often in ritual ways to establish successful patterns of behaviour, such as getting to sleep, easing anxiety or overcoming fatigue. In the case of Leanne, the tights are used as a means to ease the anxiety of avoiding the sight of her own legs, hence her earlier statement in her introduction: 'if I can't see what is on my legs, I feel a little bit better because what is out of sight is out of mind.' Since the tights play an important part in Leanne's daily routine, Gok Wan allows her the space to smoothly transition from wearing her tights all day every day, to a new object that will not only contain any of her leg anxiety when necessary but will create that much needed support that she always seeks from them. In the same room, after the playful moment and subsequent emotional realisation, Gok Wan invites Leanne to change into nude coloured support pants. Once she changes into them, she comes out from behind a portable screen, where Gok Wan is waiting for her:





*Figure 27: Gok Wan offers Leanne support pants in lieu of the tights*

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** ... there is another option for her to feel confident about her legs without those tights. This body sculpting underwear holds everything in place far better than those saggy old tights.

**Gok Wan:** How do they feel on?

**Leanne:** They feel good!

**Gok Wan:** Some of these are just support pants and what they will do, ... they will hold you in – not that you need it, right? But just on the area you don't feel comfortable. If I didn't think that you needed that confidence side then I wouldn't put you in these support pants. Now, what I don't want you to do is get used to this like the tights. These aren't for life; they are just for Christmas.



*Figure 28: Leanne reflects on her new support pants*

**Gok Wan:** Now spin around and see. Tell me how it feels to have that part of your legs exposed.

*Gok Wan here gently touches Leanne's knees and calves*

**Leanne:** It does not feel that bad actually. I quite like it! This just looks actually much better.

...

**Gok Wan:** You think we are getting somewhere?

**Leanne:** Yes, I think so!

Once again, in the holding role of the 'good enough' m/other, Gok Wan creates the opportunity and space for his subject, Leanne, to substitute her tights with new support pants. By wearing her tights inside and outside the house for four years continually, Leanne had developed a much-needed necessity for this 'comfort' object, since she felt that they lessened and covered her bodily and

emotional anxieties. However, this over-dependence on wearing tights developed into a source of frustration and insecurity within herself and her body, since the perpetual circle of wearing tights became an obstacle between her inner and outer experience of the self. Therefore, as noted in the extract above, Gok Wan introduces a new object for her to hold on to, in order to enable her to slowly transition from her 'tights' to 'no-tights' phase without interrupting violently the use of that object. Undoubtedly, to expose her straight away to wearing no tights at all would be very emotionally frustrating for the subject herself, since it is an object that holds emotional meaning and value for her. By offering her these nude colour support pants, that cover her legs just above the knee, Gok Wan recreates the much needed 'support' and 'comfort' that Leanne seeks underneath her clothes, while at the same time allowing her to transition from a state of absolute dependence to a road towards more emotional and physical independence. With the use of these support pants, Gok Wan aims not only to reconstruct that holding and comfort feeling that Leanne wants to hold on to, but he also allows for new meanings to be created, since the pants cover her tights only leaving half of her leg exposed. Once more, the facilitating role of Gok Wan comes to light, as he is seen kneeling on the floor, observing Leanne's emotional response and reaction to the task and the changes that he is introducing to her. In the next extract, it is revealed that her tights are not the only object that Leanne uses to hide her body with; she also uses her bathrobe to hide herself away in order to keep her body out of sight:

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** Leanne feels so uncomfortable about her body even in her own house and she wears constantly a

long, thick and baggy pink dressing gown to cover up her body completely to avoid even her partner seeing her naked and/or without the tights on.

**Gok Wan:** Even behind closed doors the tights stay on and even worse there is another layer.



*Figure 29: Leanne's 'safe' pink robe*

**Leanne:** I wear my dressing gown all the time ... is a comfort for me because they are big sort of thing that hides you and they wrap around you. I love this.

**Gok Wan:** This is what you wear all the time; this is your staple wardrobe, as soon as you get back from work.

**Leanne:** Yes.

**Gok Wan:** And it is to cover you up?

**Leanne:** Yeah.

**Gok Wan:** Alright.

The studio's backdrop is suggestive of an *atelier*. However, the presence of Leanne's bedroom drawer next to her and the use of the space as a fitting room are objects connotative with female intimacy and familiarity. In the following scene, Gok Wan stands behind Leanne, pulls her hair up into a ponytail and starts cutting her pink dressing gown while she is still wearing it, to produce a new garment out of it. Gok Wan cuts off the sleeves and pulls the back off the dressing gown, cuts the excess fabric to reveal her back and stitches it with pins around her hips to make it more fitted around her curves. Lastly, he shortens the length of the garment by cutting the excess fabric and reveals her legs. Ultimately, Gok Wan transforms the pink dressing gown into a knee length backless dress.



*Figure 30: Gok Wan customises Lianne's robe into a dress*

Leanne witnesses the whole transformation before her, as she is standing in front of a full-length mirror. Leanne looks surprised at her newly revealed silhouette:

**Gok Wan:** I have just made you an evening dress out of your ... dressing gown that you have been hiding in. All we've done is give you shoulders and a waist, we have kept your hips and we have tapered down, and your shape now has gone like that. All Curves. (Gok Wan with his hands draws in the air an hour-glass figure). Can you image, if that was a nice frock in a nice material?

**Leanne:** Yes, it would have been lovely!

...



*Figure 31: The reveal - the 'new' pink dress*

**Gok Wan:** It feels ok to have these legs [and chest] out?

**Leanne:** Yes, I like it! ... How sexy I feel in this dressing gown. (laughs out loud)

...

**Leanne:** The legs look really slim, it is amazing. The more I look at it, the more it is growing on me.

Here there are few elements worth discussing about this exchange. Earlier in her makeover introduction, Leanne reveals to Gok Wan that it is ‘too long to remember’ the last time she looked herself in a full-length mirror, and therefore Leanne holds an unfamiliar gaze of her actual body shape and ‘naked’ feminine silhouette. The creative techniques that Gok Wan employs as part of the makeover procedural process allow Leanne to discover her body and familiarise herself with its reflection and thus gain a new body-appreciation. Here, what is brought into relief is Leanne’s emotional realisation of how her uninterrupted practice of wearing her tights and bathrobe has actually fostered and heightened the negative view that she held about her body.

For Leanne, the pink gown provides for her a ‘holding’ capacity. As a symbol and an object, it stands not only for intimacy, since it is a garment that holds and wraps around her ‘fallible’ body, but it also reveals and hides her body insecurity, since it is an object whose purpose is to conceal her body related anxieties, whilst at the same time producing barriers between herself and others. Since Leanne always wears tights with her gown, Gok Wan starts to re-modify the gown while Leanne is wearing supporting pants, so that, in a symbolic fashion, they substitute her tights

and therefore function as a holding 'body' for her. What is significant here is that, by cutting and thus reproducing a new garment out of her old dressing gown, Gok Wan re-contextualises Leanne's comfort object for her, while at the same time he makes available new meanings and symbols to be discovered. Such activity allows Leanne to create new meanings for what already exists, which is the new sight of her body through the transformed gown. As the layers of the gown are being cut off in sections, and her silhouette slowly emerges in front of her very eyes, Leanne discovers views of her body and self that were previously hidden and concealed. In these alterations to the gown, the subject finds herself transitioning with the object itself, since the gown is being worn throughout the process of its alteration. The whole experience then symbolises for Leanne an emotional and psychological transition from her 'insecure' dependency on her 'comfort' objects towards a more body-aware subjectivity that reveals new-found individuality. Therefore, the pink gown, which was once an object related to insecurity, a barrier used to hide the body, becomes an object that reveals the body and clings tightly to it.

Such a process is very revealing when it comes to understanding the makeover in *HTLGN*. As previously indicated, *HTLGN* has a distinctive formula that separates it from its makeover competitors. It encourages neither surgical intervention on the body nor an engagement with extreme dieting or exercise regimes and, most importantly, it does not humiliate or judge the female body shape or size of the makeover subject. As Leanne's case reveals, the *HTLGN* process provides a unique and playful space in which the female subjects have the opportunity to gain a new-found experience by creating new object definitions. Unlike its makeover competitors, where the body-insecure participant and her clothes are ridiculed by



the makeover experts, for Gok Wan these objects are significant and loaded with emotional and psychological investments made by the female subjects. For Gok Wan, these objects constitute an integral part of the female subject's emotional transformation and, through the employment of playful and creative techniques, Gok allow his subjects to arrive at their own body related definitions and emotional realisations. It is through these objects that they emotionally relate to their bodies and make sense of their feminine subjective experiences, anxieties and insecurities. The focus of the makeover process on the emotional investments around these objects, and the value that it places on exploring the relationship that the female subjects hold or encounter with them, is a unique feature of the *HTLGN* practice and accentuates its focus on the importance of emotions.

Moreover, Leanne's object relating makeover process reveals a key feature of the innovative approach that Gok Wan takes to the female body. Gok Wan offers a constructive and a positive opportunity for the female body to transition along with the use of the object (piece of clothing and/or garment) that the female subject is wearing to hide behind and/or conceal her fears and anxieties. By modifying the 'comfort object' of the subject, who is using it to hide, and due to the fact that the object survives the destruction of Gok Wan's scissors while the garment is still on the body and still worn by the subject, the body is allowed to transition along with the object. So the same object that was previously used by the subject to hide, now becomes an object that reveals the body and its hidden potential, thus offering new meanings, definitions and perspectives on the body for the subject herself. It is important that she witnesses the garment's modification taking place on her body too. It is noteworthy that an important purpose behind Gok Wan's modification of

the garment while on the makeover participant's body is to reveal how the subject is not merely hiding her anxieties but meaningful aspects of her inner self-experiences which interrupt the emotional possibility for new modes of object relating definitions of the self and the external world to emerge. Therefore, Gok Wan's garment interventions provide continuity for the subject and experiences which enable her to go on being. As a result, in the case of Leanne, the (re)modification of the gown by Gok Wan develops into a 'transitional object' that survives destruction and therefore can be used as a resource that allows the individual to bridge her inner and outer world, self and other.

Winnicott says that engagements with objects create 'potential spaces', which are a type of intermediate space somewhere between subject and object. The most interesting and potentially profitable aspect of Winnicott's theory is this idea of a 'third space'. Drawing on Winnicott's ideas, Ian Woodward writes:

This space is neither the individual subject, nor the external object environment; neither inner nor outer, self nor material thing, but the spaces of creativity, play and productive imagination that are created when both meet. The third space is often taken to represent a cultural space because it unites the human subject with the external environment via a transitional object. In the process of the human subject using the object and in turn projecting emotional energy onto the object, a type of transaction is established which charges, and changes, both subject and object. It is in the third space that desires come to be materially expressed and transitioned.

(Woodward, 2011:375)

Winnicott writes that the potential space is at 'the interplay between there being nothing but me and there being objects and phenomena outside omnipotent control' (Winnicott, 1953:100). Because it partakes of both the subject and their objective,

external environment, yet also builds upon both, ‘the transitional space represents a space where imagination meets the concrete, and what develops is a product of the unity of both’ (Woodward, 2011:375). Within this space, objects are ‘imaginatively elaborated’ (Winnicott, 1953:101), or invested with meaning through practices, for instance how these ‘tangible’ objects are being handled, touched, cuddled, worn and so on. What results then, as Woodward describes ‘is a temporary space of cultural possibility – a fusion of person with thing, the product of which is greater than the sum of its parts and which forms the basis of future social action’ (2011:375).

According to Winnicott’s theory, such playing with objects (i.e. the pink gown re-modification and the productive spaces created) assists in the development of a ‘personal pattern’ through the individual’s capacity to recognise the object as ‘not-me’. Gok Wan’s playful techniques during this procedure allow for opportunities to be created so the subject can ‘explore parts of her [personality] that were previously hidden’ (Winnicott, 1971). The notion of play that is embedded in the facilitating environment of *HTLGN* has the capacity to bridge the subject’s inner world with the outer world through the transitional space of the programme. Such moments symbolise an important part of the makeover dynamic, one that has not been drawn out before in the study of the makeover discourse and format.

Here, it is important to briefly comment on Gok Wan’s artistic role and his performance of cutting the pink gown object. As depicted in the above screenshot (Figure 31), Gok Wan’s stylistic/fashion knowledge about clothes making comes into play, and he now becomes the artist where, by cutting the pink gown object,

he (re)creates a new one, thus allowing the subject to create new associations and definitions on how she relates to and thus ‘uses’ the (re)created object. Here, the notion of cutting can be connected to Winnicott’s idea of object destruction and its survival, which leads to emotional awareness, self-understanding and facilitates growth. Interestingly, in this instance it is not the subject that destroys her own found ‘comfort’ object but it is Gok Wan who initiates the process, by making use of his stylistics techniques and practices. To further develop my understanding of this discussion, it is important to offer a psychoanalytic commentary that uncovers the role of the analyst as artist and the consulting space as a ‘studio’.

The psychoanalyst Andrea Sabbadini writes that, when discussing creativity from a psychoanalytic perspective, one cannot overlook the creative aspects of psychoanalytic work. He therefore compares the consulting space with that of an artist’s studio: within the ‘consistent, and therefore relatively safe space provided by our “studios”’ (Sabbadini, 2014:139) the analyst can make creative use of the material brought by the patient and therefore ‘it is the analyst rather than the patient who takes on one of the functions performed by the artist’ (Townsend, 2015:129). In his formulation, Sabbadini (2014:139) writes that the analyst’s task ‘involves the creative use of the material brought to us by our patients, in combination with that brought to sessions by our own personal and professional experience’, commenting that, as psychoanalysts, ‘we are editors involved in the selection, cutting and pasting together of dissociated fragments, out of which we help re-create old pictures, or create new ones’ (2014:140). Even though Gok Wan’s role is not that of an analyst, it can be argued that his artistic role in ‘cutting’ the object with his scissors, and almost ‘pasting’ new meaning onto it, facilitates a creative

experience within his 'studio' space that allows him rebuild and reform his subject's emotional response to and associations with these objects and by extension their body.

I will now turn to my next case analysis, which is that of Nikki. My psychoanalytic study will reveal new dimensions of the 'follow-up' steps in makeover discourse, further demonstrating the role of creativity in *HTLGN*. I will extrapolate key creative moments that transpire in the transitioning of the subject's relationship to her body and thus help to generate new cultural experience for her.

#### *How To Look Good Naked: The case of Nikki*

'The quality of play ... is synonymous with creative living and constitutes the matrix of self-experience throughout life' (Abram, 2007:246). In the creative spaces of *HTLGN* the use of play allows for hitherto unseen aspects of the self and personality to be explored, thus allowing new emotional and subject experiences of the body and self to emerge. In the object relating arena, play is important as it facilitates growth. Play implies *trust* and belongs to the potential space between the baby and the m/other figure. It is important to note that play is not an inner psychic reality. It takes place outside the individual, but it is not part of the external world per se. For Winnicott, the notion of playing constitutes an important aspect of self-experience, and it is through playfulness that one can be creative and explore and/or discover his/her personality. Being creative in a very mundane and everyday sense is vital to all forms of relations.

Here, I would like to draw attention to another moment/episode of the programme which is the case of Nikki (Series 3, Episode 11), aged 35, who hates her tummy and is terrified at the thought of anyone seeing her naked. As a consequence of such anxiety, she has been avoiding intimate relationships for three years. As I described in Chapter 2 in the case of Kelly, the makeover procedure has so far entailed the initial mirror/self-reflective process, and the ‘line-up psychological exercise’, along with public feedback on the subject’s body image. The next step involves play in *HTLGN*, as we saw in the case of Leanne discussed above. With Nikki, Gok Wan takes her through the same series of makeover procedural stages, with each one allowing Nikki to reconfigure her own emotional experience and her perception of her naked body, thus generating a positive attitude towards it. In order to achieve this, Gok Wan engages Nikki in a ‘naked’ self-esteem building exercise that takes place in a department store window (Figure 32). This combines and repeats elements of the usual procedure, and this usefully highlights the importance of self-reflexivity in the show.

The widespread assortment of clothes, shoes, undergarments and shopping bags are a collection of objects that signify beauty, luxury and sexual attractiveness. Their display behind the glass window accentuates their exhibition as fetish-objects of postfeminist desire<sup>25</sup>. Even though such a reading is widely displayed in the makeover screenshot, and clearly invites Freud’s discussion on ‘fetishism’ (1927),

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<sup>25</sup> The role of product placement in the postfeminist makeover genre has been examined by Bell & Hollows, 2005; d’Astous & Seguin, 1999; Kretchmer, 2008; La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Lewis, 2009; McMurria, 2008; Murray & Ouellette, 2004; Ouellette, 2016; Redden, 2007; Sender, 2006, 2012; Toffoletti, 2014. While these insights provided by such work help to frame the complex dynamic of neoliberal values in relation to femininity, the focus in this thesis is on how the objects brought into the makeover narrative itself by the participants enables a significant shift in the format as a whole. For this reason, I have set aside debate around product placement in order to focus on how *HTLGN* varies the familiar makeover format through the incorporation of deeply personal objects of which have psychological significance for those involved in the process.

nevertheless my analysis will not research this possible line of investigation further, as it is not the most important aspect of my psychoanalytic reading of the series.



*Figure 32: Nikki's shop window*

Gok Wan walks with Nikki late in the evening around a street full of major department stores in London and draws her attention to a particular and very special shop window that is deliberately designed and staged in a very theatrical fashion, full of colourful garments, women's accessories and other feminine fashion related objects as well as a half-open wardrobe crammed with colourful dresses. The explosion of colours that can be seen from the street outside creates an alluring image that almost belongs to the realms of fantasy and results in Nikki looking at it, captivated:



*Figure 33: Gok Wan introduces Nikki to her window challenge*

**Gok Wan:** That window for me represents you!

**Nikki:** Awwwww!!!

**Gok Wan:** Shopping, glory, extravagance and playing around almost like 'Narnia' that closet is right? ... But it is missing something isn't it. I think is missing a model isn't it?

**Nikki:** Yeah!!! (Giggles)

**Gok Wan:** There is no model in there is there?

**Nikki:** No, there isn't.

**Gok Wan:** What is REALLY missing is a naked model, isn't it?

**Nikki:** Oh My God! (Giggling)

**Gok Wan:** Tonight, my darling (Gok Wan kisses Nikki on her forehead) I would like you to get your bootie into that window



completely in the buff and really, really undress. Would you do it?

**Nikki:** Yeah!!!! (giggles)

As previously discussed, the *HTLGN* process begins with Gok Wan's mirror sequence arrangement, where the female subject is invited to emotionally reflect in front of the full-length mirrors on her 'naked' body related concerns and experiences, as previous case examples have shown. In this instance, Gok Wan has transformed a shop window into a theatrical restaging with fashion artefacts that, according to him, represent his subject's vibrant personality and fashion style. The artistic atmosphere that Gok Wan constructs and opens up to Nikki serves as an intermediate space for her to step into and experience raw and naked aspects of herself and her body related feelings. This space then becomes creative, because it allows Nikki to enter into a facilitating area and engage with her whole personality and explore 'naked' aspects of the self that were previously emotionally unexplored. This creative challenge assembled by Gok Wan implies 'separation', since Nikki will engage in this 'naked' challenge in the 'absence' of Gok Wan. This is significant in the object relating process for Nikki's emotional transformational development, since it will give her the makeover opportunity to manage feelings of anxiety and tolerate her frustration in a playful and creative manner. Gok Wan's artistic restaging serves as an original opportunity for Nikki to step into and experience 'naked' aspects of herself and in a creative way attempt to discover her individuality and identity.

The shop window now becomes a mirror reflection of Nikki's prospective new confident self, but Nikki is not yet in the right location – symbolically – to envision herself in the way that Gok Wan has done, for she is still standing in her own subjective reality, not having yet transitioned. It is noteworthy that the glass reflective screen now becomes that intermediate space and/or border that separates fantasy from reality, a component that becomes evident by the use of Gok Wan's symbolic interpretation and theatrical staging of the show room. For instance, the symbolic reference to the wardrobe as 'Narnia' in the shop window is a reference to *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. This is a novel by Clive Staples Lewis (1950), where the wardrobe, in the fantasy children's story, represents the door into the fantasy land of Narnia, a world where there are new discoveries to be made and endless possibilities. Such a reference leads to the notion that the stage window facilitates the creation of a 'potential space' (Winnicott, 1971), where experience originates, as well as giving place to the possibility of playing and creativity. Using Winnicott's terms, we may suggest that Gok Wan, through his artistry, constructs a frame, a transitional space where creativity finds expression; and he invites Nikki to enter into that space while he is choosing symbols and images that connote such activity.

Once Nikki accepts the challenge, she changes into a white dressing gown, gets her hair and make-up done and enters through a backdoor into the showroom with Gok Wan who holds her hand tightly. At this moment the enclosed room/space signals security and perhaps secrecy for Nikki and the holding presence of Gok Wan, who holds her hand, allows her to feel safe and at ease. In this makeover challenge, Nikki will eventually remove her robe and stand 'naked' by herself inside the

protected almost ‘womb’-like space that Gok Wan has nurtured for her. Symbolically, the experience of being back in the womb is represented through the depiction of Nikki being emotionally protected inside the room, behind the closed red curtains. Being in the womb symbolically signals the birthing process. The birthing process must start as distressing but eventually leads to a liberating experience when meeting with the external world. Nikki’s distress will be experienced through the naked challenge that she will have to undertake alone (and without the physical presence of Gok Wan) towards the unknown (the external world) located behind the curtains. Therefore, to encounter the ‘naked’ liberating experience of the outside world, Nikki must suffer the loss of the comfort space, which will take place once the curtains open. The opening of the curtains initiates the birthing process, which indicates a form of emotional transformation. Consequently, the staging arrangement that Gok Wan has assembled creates a ‘transitional space’ that is able to protect but also to foster the future separation and autonomy. In Chapter 6, I will address Gok Wan’s experience of finding himself ‘back in the womb’ and offer a psychoanalytic account of his emotionally reflective experience in *HTLGN*:



*Figure 34: Gok Wan accompanies Nikki into her window challenge*

**Gok Wan:** How do you feel?

**Nikki:** Nervous.

**Gok Wan:** What is the worst thing that could happen, Nikki?

**Nikki:** Rejection!

**Gok Wan:** I promise to you now hands on heart, that no one is going to reject you – because you are gonna look absolutely sensational, OK?

**Nikki:** Yeah!

By holding Nikki's hand while entering into the room, Gok Wan makes available a physical and psychological holding environment where she can feel safe. Taking into consideration that the naked challenge in the shop window could trigger an overwhelming sensation for Nikki, Gok Wan's presence begins to comfort her by helping her to establish the room as a safe space. In creating such a comforting moment for Nikki, Gok Wan reveals his 'good enough' capacity to recognise and

acknowledge her anxieties and fears with regard to the challenge that it is about to begin. In addition, the presence of Gok Wan, walking in and holding Nikki by her hand, is evocative of the subject's vulnerability as well as her continuing dependence on Gok Wan. His physical and symbolical holding of her hand is an indicator once more of the confidence and trust that Nikki places in him. This is an important dynamic that enables Nikki to feel a sense of emotional reassurance in entering into the 'naked' stage window challenge to embark on the playful activity arranged by Gok Wan.

According to Winnicott, 'confidence in the mother makes an intermediate playground [a place where play starts here], where the idea of magic originates, since the ... [individual] does to some extent *experience* omnipotence' (Winnicott, 1971:47, italics in original). An important component that arises throughout the scene is the notion of 'mirroring' that Gok Wan makes available to his subject through the comfort, reassurance and emotional attunement, not only in that particular scene but as well as throughout the makeover process. Winnicott writes about a stage of emotional development, when the infant still perceives the m/other as part of himself/herself. Therefore, if the environmental m/other performs her functions of holding and handling in a good-enough way, she also presents herself as an object in such a way, which will respect 'the infant's legitimate experience of omnipotence.' (Winnicott, 1971:112). So, the m/other's mirroring gaze upon her infant is a founding experience, as it establishes a template in the infant's ego as a site for something good and confirms the infant's place in the world. As Winnicott clearly states in his works, the notion of good enough mothering 'is too easily taken for granted' (Winnicott, 1971:112) and 'this state of heightened sensitivity'

(Winnicott, 1956: 302) is necessary for the m/other to be able to mirror her baby  
'... if the mother provides a good enough adaptation to need, the infant's own line  
of life is disturbed very little by reactions to impingements' (Winnicott, 1956:302).

The confirmation and the mirroring process that is present in Gok Wan is very  
important here, as it allows for the participant to develop into a more autonomous  
self, as the self-object is the subject's experience of her own power and  
competence. For instance, Gok Wan knowingly absorbs what the participant is  
feeling and communicates back recognition and acceptance, while at the same time  
enhancing Nikki's inner security and self-worth in order to face up the task that he  
has set for her to complete. Once Nikki receives Gok Wan's emotional reassurance  
with regard to her anxiety over the naked challenge, she is then placed by Gok Wan  
to face the half-open wardrobe, while he passes her a long colourful dress on a  
hanger which aims to hide her naked front body parts, allowing only the back of  
her body to be visible to the outside.



*Figure 35: A view of the crowd outside the closed curtain window*

Once Gok Wan makes sure that Nikki feels comfortable and safe within the space, he walks back outside again on the street, where a small group of men and women have gathered to witness Nikki's revelation, and, at his signal, the curtains open revealing Nikki who is now part of this staged performance, giggling at the sight and sound of the crowd.



*Figure 36: Gok Wan signals for the curtains to open*



*Figure 37: Gok Wan communicates with Nikki through a walkie-talkie device*

Because Gok Wan uses a walkie-talkie, Nikki can hear the crowd cheering, supporting her bravery and her confidence in completing such an undertaking. Some women from the crowd make positive and encouraging statements with regard to her naked body, e.g. 'She looks gorgeous' and 'She is a real woman', all of which comfort Nikki and make her feel emotionally contented throughout the challenge.

Once more there are visual elements throughout these scenes that are worth analysing through Winnicott's object relations psychoanalytic lens, and they are essential in understanding how emotional development and the modification of the subject is made possible during this naked makeover challenge. As mentioned previously, this is the first *HTLGN* task that Nikki is invited to complete without the immediate presence of Gok Wan, since such an action will allow her the space to establish herself as well as to separate the 'me' from the 'not me', which is an emotional transition of the subject state from absolute dependence to relative dependence. At this time, she realises that she is still dependent on Gok Wan to meet her emotional needs and comfort her. However, her already 'good enough' interaction with him has been internalised, thus allowing her now to cope with the loss of her omnipotence. As a result, she now develops the ability to accept the challenges that Gok Wan sets out for her are outside of her control, and she develops the capacity to separate from him and face the task alone.

To ease the process of facing the emotional task alone in the absence of Gok Wan, Nikki has been given a dress from a hanger to hold. This serves the symbolic



function of a ‘transitional object’, which arises once again in the context of ‘good-enough mothering’ within a facilitating environment.

Although the dress is an actual object, it is symbolic of a third reality, a resting place that exists ‘in between’ subject and object – between that which is merged with the m/other, and that which is outside and separate. As Winnicott (1971:14) underlines, transitional objects preserve the illusion of symbiosis with the m/other, ‘thus allowing the infant the illusion that what the infant creates really exists’. Once the curtains open, Nikki is revealed to the outside world. The stage room becomes an intermediate space where playing is now initiated and the subject can begin to creatively engage with her whole personality.



*Figure 38: Nikki waves at the crowd before the curtains close*

The symbolic reference to the story of Narnia comes to life, once Gok Wan signals for the curtains to open; in other words, he opens the door for his subject to explore that space that is full of self-potential and discovery.

While Nikki enters into that fantasy playground area, Gok Wan still continues to offer his encouragement and containment from outside through the walkie-talkie device, because playing necessitates ‘being alone in the presence of someone’ (Winnicott, 1971:47). As I described earlier in my analysis, I compared the entrance of Nikki into the shop window with entering into a ‘womb’ area nurtured and protected by Gok Wan. The symbolic association of Nikki’s placement into a womb space signposts the reading that the walkie-talkie operates as an umbilical symbol of communication.<sup>26</sup> This transmits Gok Wan’s voice (who is out of Nikki’s peripheral sight) in an attempt to soothe, calm and free Nikki from any heightened emotional anxieties that she might experience during her ‘naked’ makeover challenge. Winnicott writes that ‘*playing is essentially satisfying*’, and in playing a level of anxiety is always present. However, an ‘unbearable’ degree of anxiety ‘destroys playing’ (1971:52, italics in original). As a result, Gok Wan’s attempt to ease her nervousness through his voice allows Nikki in full ‘nakedness’ to enjoy the playful experience of emotionally engaging with her surrounding objects. In Chapter 5, I will offer a psychoanalytic account of Gok Wan’s use of voice, touch and an empathetic stance and I explain how these contribute to the development of the motherly approach he adopts. These characteristics are central

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<sup>26</sup> In Chapter 6, I will address how Gok Wan’s umbilical symbol develops into a ‘string’ of communication that resonates with Ariadne’s role in the Greek myth of Minotaur and the Labyrinth.

to understanding the development of Gok Wan's charismatic persona, as the 'one who cares'.

Drawing on Winnicott's theory of play, this stage is an important part of the developmental process, because the '[individual] is now playing on the basis of the assumption who loves and who is therefore reliable is available' (1971:48) as can be seen in the extract above. The notion of play in makeover discourse can be understood as an 'experience', a pleasurable and creative one, that introduces the chance of enrichment for the subject, allowing her to discover her inner potential as well as to create the capacity to contain this experience, as she transitions towards independence, which according to Winnicott is never absolute.

Nikki is now located in a playful space where she can relate to objects in a new and meaningful form, which allows her to discover emotions and feelings that were never before associated with her naked self. These emotions can now be reflected back, thus allowing her to 'feel real', and through the playful activity she experiences a new emotional dimension of being and living in relation to her body. What is evident through the overall experience is that Nikki is now able to move towards a change in outlook, self-expression and awareness in relation to both her former 'naked' experiences and perceptions and the new found ones that have been facilitated through *HTLGN's* playful setting. It is this 'in-between space' which serves as a resting place between inner and outer reality, between psyche and culture, and it is only through entering into that space-in-between (between self and other, between subjective and objective, between undeveloped and developed) and freely playing there, with the transitional objects that are symbolic of such in-

between-ness, that one can hope to grow into a meaningful relationship with an objective other.

This, then, allows Nikki to arrive at a state of integration, emotional and feelingful coherence, all of which generate self-authenticity and have a direct effect in acquiring self-knowledge, as the following extract will show.

Therefore, shortly after Gok Wan signals again for the curtains to close, he steps back into the room, hugs and kisses Nikki while congratulating her on accomplishing such a challenging task with confidence and lies down with Nikki on a bed of pillows. Nikki once again is wearing her white robe, and she is still surrounded by shoes, accessories and dresses when Gok Wan asks her to reflect on her experience. The room now has transformed into the symbolic space of a consulting room, as well as one that resembles a bedroom, an intimate space, where the subject feels safe enough to reflect on her emotional experience.

**Nikki:** That was absolutely amazing!

**Gok Wan:** Honestly, please tell me how are you feeling?

**Nikki:** Amazing, out of this world, I have never felt like this before in my whole life ever!

**Gok Wan:** That is brilliant!

**Nikki:** I never believed I could be like this; I am so pleased I have done it now. I feel amazing and it is great to know I look great.

As this makeover process is complete, the transition is now complete, allowing separation to be tolerated and enabling the creation of a good enough internal holding environment for her to hold onto as she continues on the process alone after the show.

What becomes evident from the extracts above, and throughout the programme's episodes, is the actuality that for the female subjects, Gok Wan has the capacity to emotionally restore his subjects' unhappy relationship with their bodies, while at the same time offering them the space and the necessary support to commence a new sense of body appreciation, thus developing a more conscious sense of emotional understanding of the self as well as reaching new (re)definitions of identity. The programme's wishful hope for change, along with the trust and confidence that the subjects have invested in Gok Wan, permits the female participants to commit wholeheartedly to the playful yet challenging self-reflective exercises that he ascribes to them, which generate and often lead to intense moments and emotional confrontations. As mentioned earlier, Gok Wan's motherly approach in comforting and providing emotional relief to his female subjects problematises the depiction of Gok Wan as embracing the characteristics of a therapist, because he is not a qualified analyst and, as the following chapter addresses, he has not overcome his own former body-related struggles. However, in the following section, I will further this discussion by examining Gok Wan's function as a 'transformational agent'.

### **Gok Wan: A *Transformational* Agent**

Throughout the setting of *HTLGN*, Gok Wan reveals a capacity of knowing *how to* emotionally restore his subjects' unhappy relationship with their bodies. The motherly stance he adopts throughout the procedural process allows him to offer his subjects the space and the necessary support to commence a new sense of body appreciation, thus developing a more conscious sense of emotional self-understanding as well as reach new (re)definitions of identity. Gok Wan's capacity to facilitate his subjects' emotional transformation gives rise to the view of him as a 'transformational agent'. But how can the notion of Gok Wan as a 'transformational agent' be understood and explored in terms of his capacity to stimulate a change while at the same time encouraging a sense of trust and belief which is invested by the participants?

Once again, the object relations tradition and Christopher Bollas's psychoanalytic ideas are instructive here and will shed light on those hidden and meaningful elements that craft Gok Wan's transformational possibilities to (re)generate new definitions of the postfeminist body. Bollas's (1987) work represents an important generalising development of Winnicott's idea of the transitional object. Aligned with object relations psychoanalysis, Bollas's psychoanalytic perspective 'seeks to isolate the traces of early object seeking patterns in the psychological structures people inhabit in later life. Thus, early object interactions are telling for patterns of object attachment in later life' (Woodward, 2011:376). Whereas Winnicott (1957) talked about transitional objects, Bollas prefers the term 'transformational object' and associates such an object with a capacity for self-transformation, whether objects are used in early childhood or indeed in later life.

For Bollas, as Woodward (2011:376) points out, ‘the transformational object is not just an experience but a process, therefore, any engagement with an object alters both the subject and object and this is best thought of as being transformational in character, emphasizing its productive capacity and productive dimensions’.

Bollas’s work discusses the critical role of the mother in early development by applying and extending Winnicott’s understanding of the ‘environmental mother’ (Winnicott, 1945, 1952). Bollas describes the transformational functions as the ‘the idiom of gesture, gaze and intersubjective utterance’ (1987:13) and defines it thus: ‘the transformational object: the mother’s function as a processor of the infant. Known less as an actual other or as a formable internal object, the mother is an object known through her continued action that alters the infant’s psychosomatic being’ (1989:213). Bollas suggests that the patterns of object engagement experienced in early childhood carry over into adult life:

A transformational object is experientially identified by the infant with processes that alter self-experience, ... Not yet fully identified as another, the mother is experienced as a process of transformation and this feature of early existence lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation. Thus, in adult life ... the object is pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self, .... Since it is an identification that begins before the mother is mentally represented as an other, it is an object relation that emerges not from desire, but from a perceptual identification of the object with its functions: the object as an enviro-somatic transformer of the subject. The memory of this early object relation manifests itself in the person's search for an object (a person, place, event, ideology) that promises to transform the self. (Bollas, 1987:14)

The transformation of the self begins to occur through the mother who, in fact, changes the environment for the infant. The transformation continues as the infant develops his or her own capacities to become his/her own transformational agent. Building on the work of Bollas, Mann (2002:60) argues that ‘throughout life there remains a longing for the ability to submit to objects that will change the subject’s self experience ... In adult life, this longing is expressed through ... mystical processes, or, in, formally non-religious individuals, [in hope for a] ... change’. Bollas’s (1987) development of Winnicott’s idea of the transitional object allows us to draw out the implications of his approach for understanding the role of Gok Wan, not only as a style consultant but also more of a ‘transformational agent’, whose quest lies in the transformation of the female participants’ mental and emotional state in relation to their bodies.

In Chapter 6, I examine Gok Wan’s cultural representation as a ‘transformational agent’ outside the confined space of the makeover setting, by examining his involvement in the *Activia* ‘feel-good from within’ yogurt campaign. Moreover, I will address his depiction as the Fairy Gok/mother in the advertised text and comment on his position in promoting healthy eating using the *HTLGN* ‘feel good’ approach.

During the makeover process, Gok Wan frequently modifies the environment and the surroundings where the subject emotionally works through her embodied anxieties. Each stage of the makeover discourse involves a different challenge and/or confrontation and this series of activities generates a transformative growth. Gok Wan’s transformative role becomes apparent within the makeover discourse,



since he takes his subject through a journey of self-discovery and emotional development that can occur only and if the environment that he sets for every self-reflective challenge is aligned with the degree of the participant's vulnerability and emotional strength. During the subject's state of absolute dependence and emotional vulnerability, Gok Wan meets his subject in his empty white studio, which symbolises the initiation of her transformational development. In order for Gok Wan to alter the subject's mental state, he alters features of their environment. For instance, in the case of Leanne, Gok Wan uses his studio to transform it into her bedroom and through this transformation, he allows Leanne to confront her anxious association with her tights. The transformation continues also in the next scene, where Gok Wan transforms an object/gown on the subject's body while allowing her to create new associations. As the subject develops emotionally and becomes more aware of herself and her bodily potential, Gok Wan changes once again the environment and takes her outside of the comfort of his studio as in the case of Nikki's staged showroom. Within the modification purpose of the makeover discourse, Gok Wan creates an assortment of creative and symbolic spaces that conjure up symbolic images that belong in a gallery décor, where the 'white cube' allows objects to become all the more meaningful and symbolic.

By entering into Gok Wan's makeover 'gallery' space, the subjects are offered the opportunity to engage with objects in a setting 'out of the ordinary', since the *HTLGN* experience with the encounter creates a 'frame' that Winnicott terms holding or facilitating environment, since it permits the subject's confident exploration of the new, the unfamiliar as well as the discovery and transformation of the self by experience.

Another factor that allows him to be understood as a ‘transformational agent’ is the emotional communication that Gok Wan maintains with his subject during the makeover process, for instance, his emotional *attunement* to his subjects’ feelings, thoughts and emotions, as well as his presence and his empathetic awareness of the emotional troubles that the participant faces during the makeover challenges.

In addition, what is indicative of Gok Wan’s role as a ‘transformational agent’ derives from the way he offers meaning and reason to his participants’ emotional troubles with their bodies, as well as providing them with the feeling of being understood. *HTLGN* can be considered as a ‘potential space’ that allows for current emotional embodied feminine experiences to be identified, safely voiced, managed and potentially worked through while, at the same time, it forms a holding environment for the participants to create new emotional associations and definitions in relation to the feminine ‘transitional’ objects they relate to and make sense of their naked body experiences.

By creating reflective spaces where feelingful states of feminine subjective experiences are negotiated and playfully explored, *HTLGN* enables the female subjects to gain a more profound understanding of their own body and identity. This process allows the female participants to make sense of and create new emotional definitions and interpretations of what constitutes the desired and/or postfeminist ‘good-enough’ body. These definitions abolish the illusionary body-perfection ideals promoted by popular print media. In the *HTLGN* framework, they realise their feminine body as ‘good enough’ and the participants are able to tolerate their fallibilities and learn to accept their body imperfections. The

makeover experience allows the subjects to attain a 'real' understanding of themselves in relation to their bodies and thus acquire an emotional knowledge of their self, which can be culturally therapeutic since it allows them to gain emotional relief by overcoming these body insecurities. It is worth commenting here that Gok Wan invites his subjects to undertake challenges where their body is fully experienced as 'whole object', and therefore its 'real' attractiveness is recognised in the process. This enables the female subjects to emotionally discover their unique and individual identity in a 'holding' and constructive postfeminist setting.

For Gok Wan, the postfeminist body is full of potential, beauty and hidden qualities, qualities that tend to be ignored, undervalued and unexplored. Aside from its rejection of drastic and surgical body interventions, what makes the makeover space of *HTLGN* stand out from its competitors is that Gok Wan opens up new spaces where the ordinary 'naked' postfeminist body can create its own new meanings, definitions and experiences. To achieve this, the expert recreates moments and experiences that take the subject back into that space of creativity and playfulness where the sense of subjective self was initially crafted, a space where the early object relations were first introduced in the relationship between m/other and infant/child. It is applicable, then, to say that *HTLGN* can be regarded as a space of 'cultural experience' for the female protagonists and for the viewers as their extension. Through the interpretation and negotiation of ordinary concerns, subjectivities and meanings are always in process and are continually created and re-created to produce new experiences and a new sense of identity while attaining a deeper understanding of the self.

Once more Winnicott's ideas are pertinent for the deeper understanding of such a claim, since he comments that 'subjectivity is deeply imbued with cultural experience, just as our cultural experiences reflect our anxiety and desires' (Yates and Sclater, 2002:132). He then explicitly links his descriptions of 'cultural experience' in adult life to the 'transitional phenomena' of infancy and to the space that emerges between the infant and the mother for play.

For the developing infant, the capacity for creative cultural experience is the need for a reliable 'facilitating environment', but in adult life, transitional space is the realm of culture and creative activity, where meanings are made and remade. As Yates and Day Sclater suggest:

... [T]he subject is always in process and, like an artist, is able to use this space as a palette, to mix and creatively transform the potential colours and textures of existing symbols, fantasies, wishes and ideas into something new and different. The narratives that abound in our culture, through which we routinely make sense of our experiences and fashion our sense of ourselves can be conceptualised in terms of these 'transitional phenomena'. (Yates & Day Sclater, 2000:136)

Such an illustration becomes a symbolic representation of the endless possibilities that become available for the female participants within the makeover discourse, as well as the potential for their creative enrichment of the self. Through the narratives and interpretations that arise within the culturally constructive space of the popular makeover programme, the subjects are able to explore hidden and unacknowledged aspects of themselves at a level that leads to developmental growth, while at the same time crystallising and sharpening their identity. That space is neither one of fantasy nor reality, but is one where imagination,

symbolisation and creativity are possible; where meanings and communication are enabled. Therefore, *HTLGN*'s cultural and political significance lies in the fact that it offers the possibility of a therapeutic opportunity for postfeminist subjects to find relief by overcoming their emotional despairs experienced in relation to the body, while also building a meaningful perspective on their inner and outer self and a sense of identity.

Moreover, Gok Wan plays an important role in instigating this cultural significance and experience. Even though I have discussed the role of Gok Wan as one that is indicative of a good enough motherly approach, in the next chapter I will further examine his media persona within the *HTLGN* discourse. I will address key elements of his charismatic personality in inspiring trust and familiarity to the subject. The three elements that I will explore in this respect are his use of his voice, proximity and affective tactility, as well as his capacity for empathy to generate trust in his subjects so that they feel comforted and open up and face their fears and vulnerabilities. A psychoanalytic exploration of Gok Wan's key charismatic features will allow me to expand this discussion of *HTLGN* in order to reveal what is at stake emotionally for Gok Wan himself, as well as the potential emotional and cultural experiences that he encounters through his reflective engagement with his female subjects' body related troubles.

## CHAPTER 5

### *I was reliving the pain I'd tried so hard to forget: Gok Wan's Naked reveal*

Exuberant, enthusiastic and highly empathetic, Gok Wan is a fashion stylist whose name has been associated in popular (makeover) British media with 'body confidence' and 'self-esteem'. As I demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, Gok Wan's friendly and almost motherly approach towards his female subjects during their emotional transformation in *HTLGN* has distinguished him from his makeover competitors, such as Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine (*WNTW*). This different approach by the expert towards the female subject in the makeover space was acknowledged by Wignall in her article in *The Guardian*:

[For] Trinny and Susannah ... the [female] human body is an imperfect, frequently ugly, thing and must be camouflaged with cleverly constructed coverings, [but for] Gok Wan ... you're gorgeous to start with and, with the right clothes, can only become more so. And then he gives you a hug and tells you he loves you. (Wignall, 2008)

In each and every case in the *HTLGN* series, Gok Wan is pictured caressing, touching and/or stroking his female subjects, not only when they feel emotionally overwhelmed and fragile, but also in moments where they are feeling gratified, content and excited. His affectionate and tactile approach towards his female subject provides a maternal element to his performance that is connotative of the soothing attention required by an infant in the context of its early experience of the emotional self. This raises an important question - what are the effects of this type of feminine performance within the makeover discourse? Drawing on Winnicott's

work on the role of the maternal function, this chapter explores case study materials to situate Gok Wan's function in the programme and to understand the emotional significance of his role and influence in reconfiguring the makeover discourse. In this chapter, I discuss key features and characteristics of Gok Wan, such as his voice, tactile approach and empathetic stance towards his female subjects and argue that these contribute to the development of the expert's widely celebrated 'charismatic' persona within the makeover framework of *HTLGN* and the popular view of him 'as the one who cares'.

Drawing on object relations psychoanalytic ideas, I will provide a reflective account of how his voice and tactile approach also contribute to the development of Gok Wan's role in adopting a 'motherly' approach, and I will discuss how this is validated through the 'holding environment' that he creates in the makeover framework. Additionally, I will examine Gok Wan's caring stance towards his subjects' body-image concerns as a form of empathy that derives from his personal experiences in dealing with weight struggles and how these emotions transpire in the setting. This psychoanalytic account of the expert's role and position in the setting allows me to scrutinise whether the *HTLGN* process, and in particular the mirror sequence, bring to the surface Gok Wan's own former unresolved issues. This is central in analysing the unconscious processes that are at play in the *HTLGN* phenomenon as a whole, and how this points towards an evolution of the makeover format at a time when concerns with a therapeutic cultural ethos were in the ascendant.

Much of the visual action of the programme takes place in spaces stereotypically coded as feminine, including the shopping mall and the clothes shop. Gok Wan is also often pictured in private spaces where access is typically afforded only to lovers and/or friends, such as the woman's bedroom or a changing room. Evidently, it is Gok Wan's (homo)sexuality that allows him to enter into these feminine spaces and gain unspoken consent. This provides him with the physical proximity to his female subjects that is necessary throughout the 'naked' makeover process. When the female subjects are required to remove their clothes in front of the mirror and/or complete a 'naked' makeover challenge, Gok Wan often labels himself as 'Aunty Gok' and/or 'Fairy Gok-mother' for their benefit. The use of familiar terms are connotative of close female relations and suggestive of a symbolic family relatedness between Gok Wan and his female participants, thus marking the makeover space as female friendly. In addition, Gok's makeover role of the 'Fairy Gokmother' is connotative of the Fairy Godmother in the story of *Cinderella* who is a helpful, caring, empathetic, loving and maternal figure who has the 'magic' capacity to transform emotional pain into growth. Consequently, these commonly used epithets also signify Gok Wan's presence as that of a protective and/or maternal figure, while at the same time eliminating the presenter's male presence by removing the threat of sexual desire towards his female subject. Such an observation is also made in the work offered by Hannah Frith, Jayne Raisborough and Orly Klein (2010) who look upon Gok Wan's sexuality as 'suspended'.



The authors suggest that:

Gok's sexuality as *suspended* ... serves as an absent presence, simultaneously indicated and neutralized. Within the programme, Gok's sexuality is rarely spoken ... [his] persona is constructed as devoid of desire, or at least a desire that extends past the transformation of his participant ... He is without gay culture and politics; disembedded from these in order to *service* the imperative to self-transform, which, for many of his straight female participants, involves staking a viable (sexual) claim within the heterosexual economy ... this suspension also works to render Gok as 'safe' and harmless ... because his sexual desire lies elsewhere. Gok's own style and personal taste, described as 'cartoonish' ..., seem to reinforce his sexless, non-competitor presentation, as does footage of him in intimate spaces ... that, in different circumstances, would trigger different readings and responses. (Frith, Raisborough & Klein, 2010:479-481)

The position of the gay expert in popular makeover and lifestyle television has produced a great deal of academic debate and discussion in the discipline of gender politics and performance (Clarkson, 2005; Gallagher, 2004; Hart, 2004; Lewis, 2007; Meyer and Kelly, 2004; Miller, 2005; Weber, 2009). However, for the purposes of my own interpretative work, I will consider Gok Wan's sexuality as 'suspended' from the show's narratives. As I argue in Chapter 3, Gok's 'suspended' sexuality provides a safe makeover space and allows for a markedly different exploration of relatedness and holding in ways that have their parallel with psychoanalytic encounters. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, throughout the makeover series, Gok Wan is consistently presented as the caring figure, constantly expressing his willingness to provide the necessary support that will allow the subject to undergo the self-reflective challenges that *HTLGN* presents, especially during the mirror sequence of the programme.

Gok Wan's attentive approach towards his female subject manifests itself through his tone of voice and tactility, as well as through his explicit expressions of care, suggesting that he has the capacity to generate trust and establish intimacy with his female subjects within the makeover space. The concepts of trust and intimacy are crucial for the psychodynamics of the makeover discourse in my thesis, as my analysis will show. At the beginning of each episode of *HTLGN*, Gok Wan is always found in an empty white studio, waiting in-between the three full-length mirrors for the female subject to arrive, while she, the participant, is always seen walking through the corridors into the reflective makeover space where Gok Wan is located. To borrow a term from Winnicott, the shot of the female subject walking into the makeover 'consulting room' activates the creation of the 'potential space' (Winnicott, 1971), a space where 'cultural experience' is located. In this makeover moment, the experience is first established through the presence of Gok Wan. As I have shown in Chapter 4, the 'potential space' is the overlapping space between two individuals. It is neither the subject nor the object but includes aspects of both, and this space is facilitated by the m/other as s/he opens up spaces for her infant/child/adult to explore and experience, thus allowing for a sense of self to emerge. Therefore, Gok Wan's waiting presence arguably works to construct him as a 'good enough m/other' because he facilitates the makeover space, allowing his female participants the possibility of transitional experience.

In order to initiate familiarity and closeness with his subjects, Gok Wan always introduces himself first to his subject by saying 'Hello I am Gok, nice to meet you' followed by a handshake and a kiss on the woman's cheek. Gok's friendly 'greetings' and conversational incidental talk reflect exactly the sort of personal

exchanges one would expect to find in everyday friendly interactions, and within the programme's narratives, it is a recognised strategy for enhancing intimacy (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Gok Wan's tone of voice and his tactile approach towards his subjects in *HTLGN* have become two of his most distinctive features. They reveal his caring and empathetic approach towards his subjects. There is a great amount of academic material that discusses the emotional significance of these two fundamental cues of communication (Hall & Kapp, 1992; Knapp & Miller, 1985; Knapp, 1972). Building on these discussions, my analysis will investigate the emotional significance of Gok Wan's 'voice' and 'touch'. It will consider them as channels that provide the essential 'holding environment' for his subjects, which in turn allows them to recognise their own body potential and thus build their self-esteem.

The holding phase represents both the literal, physical holding alongside the psychological and emotional holding by the m/other. Winnicott writes that:

[Holding] refers to a three-dimensional or space relationship with time gradually added. This overlaps with, but is initiated prior to, instinctual experiences that in time would determine object relationships. It includes the management of experiences that are inherent in existence, such as the *completion* (and therefore the *non-completion*) of processes, processes which from the outside may seem to be purely physiological but which belong to infant psychology and take place in a complex psychological field, determined by the awareness and the empathy of the mother. (Winnicott, 1960b:589, italics in original)

The integrity of the holding environment depends on the ability of the mother to protect the infant, to take into account the infant's sensory experience, to provide routine care throughout the day and night, and make adjustments for momentary

changes. In this manner, the 'holding environment' is constructed within the relationship and protects the infant from its fear of annihilation:

In this place which is characterized by the essential existence of a 'holding environment' the 'inherited potential' is becoming itself a 'continuity of being'. The alternative to being is reacting, and reacting interrupts being and annihilates. Being and annihilation are the two alternatives. The 'holding environment' therefore has as its main function the reduction to a minimum of impingements to which the infant must react with resultant annihilation of personal being. Under favourable conditions the infant establishes a continuity of existence and then begins to develop the sophistications which make it possible for impingements to be gathered into the area of omnipotence.

(Winnicott, 1960b:591)

When an infant is conceived, s/he is held in the environment of the womb for approximately nine months. After birth, the infant continues to be held in the arms of the mother, and maintains her gaze, hears the sound of her voice, and experiences the smells of her body. The *close* physical contact with the mother through hugging, cuddling, caressing, embracing, rocking and so on constitutes the infant's holding environment. In the next section, I will explore how *HTLGN* simulates this kind of setting, by tapping into dimensions of unconscious experiences.

### **Gok Wan's soothing voice**

The human voice is one of our most powerful instruments, lying at the heart of the communication process. It belongs to the body and the mind. It bridges our internal and external worlds. For Anne Karpf (2006, 2013), the voice as an instrument has the capacity to soothe and offer comfort. Drawing on the work of Winnicott, she

argues that the prenatal impact on the child of hearing the mother's voice is a significant and powerful instrument and has the capacity to provide a holding function and offer containment. Drawing on the work of Karpf, it is during the course of pregnancy, that the mother's voice becomes and develops into the most significant and essential object that offers comfort to the foetus in the womb.

The prenatal experience of the mother's voice is suggestive of a calming effect for the foetus. It has been documented that the maternal voice has the capacity to slow down the foetal heart rate, which is suggestive of its soothing capacity before the baby is born. After birth the sound of the mother's voice becomes the most identifiable feature rather than her face. To the foetus, the mother's voice 'is louder and more audible than all other voices because it is conducted not just through the air but also through the mother's body' (Karpf, 2013:64) and thus she is engaged in a body-to-body experience with her baby in the womb. Therefore 'our prenatal experience predisposes and readies us to feel embraced by a voice, touched by it in a more than metaphorical way. The body remains somewhere in the voice' (Karpf, 2013:64). Such a reading demonstrates that the human voice is a powerful instrument that can exert some kind of holding function.

Drawing on the work of Karpf, it can be argued that the unconscious experiences of the infant with the mother's voice resonate with the familiarity of the encounter. Therefore, it is my view that Gok Wan's voice within the makeover space offers such a 'holding' capacity for his female subjects and that this generates for them a sense of familiarity and emotional containment. In *HTLGN*, Gok Wan's voice operates as a 'comfort' object for his subject, an object that offers reassurance as

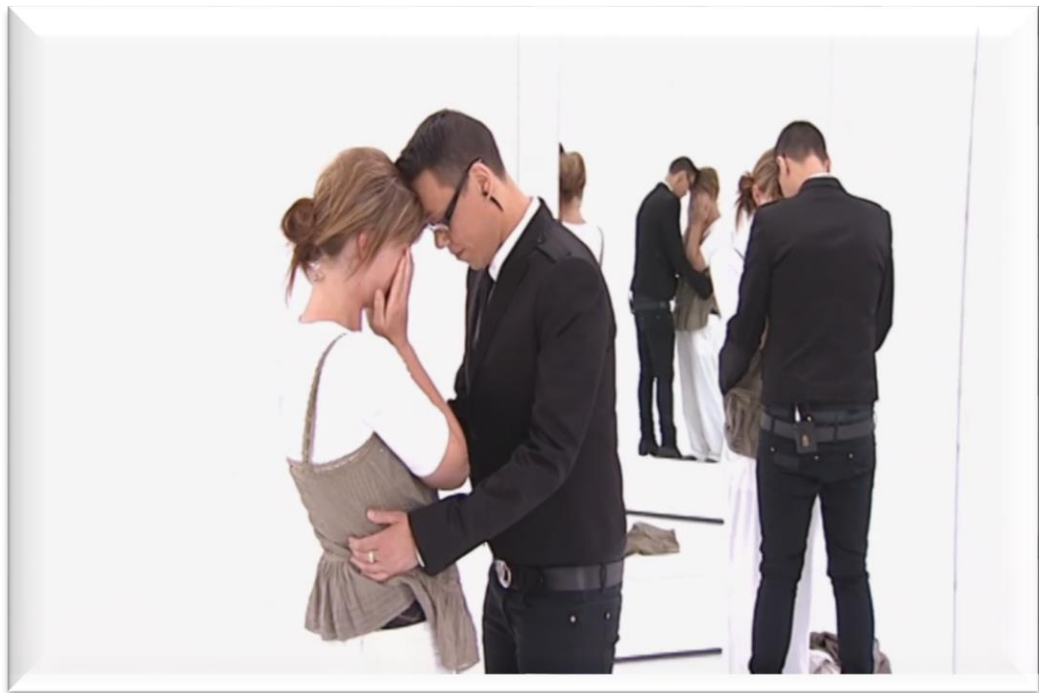
well as emotional support; it implies a (his) presence and generates closeness thus providing a 'holding' function which unconsciously harks back to the earlier experience with the mother. As outlined in Chapter 4 and through Nikki's case, Gok Wan's use of a 'walkie-talkie' provides evidence of his voice's holding capacity to soothe and offer reassurance to his participant when she is symbolically positioned 'back into the womb' space.

The ability of Gok Wan's voice to create a sense of maternal 'holding' becomes evident from the first stage of the makeover process, which involves the encounter with the mirror sequence. For the women on the programme, the start of the process entails their most vulnerable and fragile moments in the makeover experience, since it involves the analysis of their 'naked' reflections and the confrontation with their body related emotional anxieties as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The 'holding' capacity of Gok Wan's voice is demonstrated in the case of Jane (Season 4, Episode 5). After giving birth to three children, Jane lost her curvy hourglass figure due to a sudden weight loss, leaving her unhappy with her size 8 body. In an attempt to recreate the lost curves on her body and add extra volume to her 'boyish figure' (Jane's term), she wears four layers of garments plus two sets of bras in order to (re)create a fullness of her breasts or 'empty sacks', as she labels them.

Jane stands in front of the mirror with her clothes on. Gok Wan tells her to take her time and asks, when ready, that she removes each layer of her clothing down to her underwear. Jane has not seen her naked body in four years and, at the sight

of her own mirror reflection, she hesitantly attempts to remove the first garment layer but instantly feels distressed and stops herself. She then immediately turns away from the mirrors, covers her face with her hands and sobs. Gok, who stands only a few steps behind her, walks immediately towards Jane and places himself between Jane and the mirror and embraces her (Figure 39):



*Figure 39: Gok Wan comforts Jane by offering his support*

**Jane:** I don't ... (sobbing)

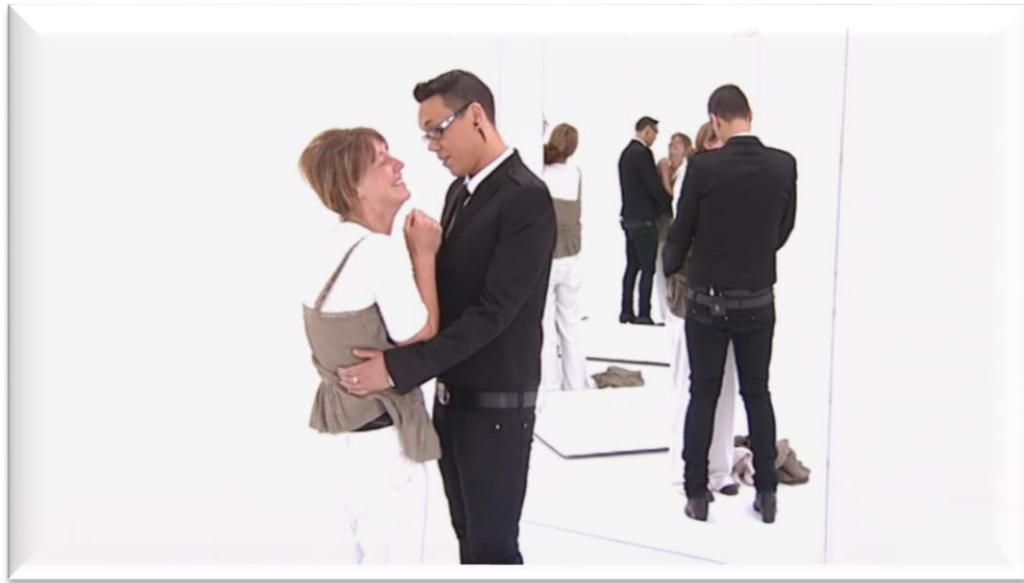
**Gok Wan:** ... Talk me through it.

**Jane:** I am really scared!

**Gok Wan:** What is the worst thing that could happen?

**Jane:** That you might laugh or something?

**Gok Wan:** ... I am not going to laugh at you. I am not here to judge you.



*Figure 40: Gok Wan comforts Jane by making her laugh*

Gok Wan's voice during this mirror moment has a soft tone and low pitch, and is easy on the ear. It is my view that Gok's voice adopts a motherly soothing tone, one that is neither intimidating nor judgmental, but nurturing. When Jane sobs in distress at the demands of the makeover task, Gok Wan focuses on Jane's emotional reaction and looks directly at Jane's face (Figure 40). Once she takes her hands off her face, Gok takes hold of her securely around the waist and leans his head closer to her face, resting his forehead on hers and gazes directly into her eyes. His tone of voice becomes even lower and softer, which has the noticeable physical effect of relaxing Jane. Jane responds to his voice with a nod and a smile.

In this makeover moment Gok Wan's voice holds her, thus offering her the necessary 'holding' support to continue with the mirror process. What becomes evident from the above extract is the immediacy of Gok Wan's voice to act like a comfort blanket, a 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1974) which provides an



emotional crutch and offers her the necessary safety to feel comforted in his presence, while at the same time allowing her to feel supported enough to face her 'nakedness'. When I refer to 'nakedness' I am not only referring to the physical state of undress, which indeed is overwhelming for the subject in its own right, but more importantly to the removal of psychological boundaries and the baring of emotions. From an object relations psychoanalytic point of view, I argue that in *HTLGN* and especially in the mirror sequence, Gok Wan's voice opens up a transitional space and provides a holding environment for his subjects. The word 'holding', as used by Winnicott, strongly evokes the image of a mother tenderly and firmly cradling her infant in her arms, and, when he/she is in distress, tightly holding him/her against her chest. As Ogden informs us,

Those psychological physical states of mother and infant are in fact the essential experiential referents for Winnicott's metaphor/concept of holding ... As the infant grows, the function of holding changes from that of safeguarding the fabric of the infant's going on being to the holding/sustaining over time of the infant's more object-related ways of being alive. One of these later forms of holding involves the provision of a 'place' (a psychological state) in which the infant ... may gather himself together. (Ogden, 2004:1350-1353)

It is worth commenting that, for his subjects, the presence of Gok Wan within the makeover space provides a potential function of what Winnicott refers to as the 'environment – mother' (Winnicott, 1963a). In this role he provides a reliable and consistently 'good enough' empathetic situation for the subject to feel safe and on which to fall back if necessary, as seen in the case of Jane.

‘The voice [holds the capacity to] ... invite or discourage intimacy’ (Karpf, 2006: 4) and in the case of Gok Wan, his voice not only invites intimacy, but it also generates trust, thus enabling his female subjects to voice their innermost thoughts and emotions in relation to their bodies and arrive at their own interpretations.

In *HTLGN*, Gok Wan is often found using key phrases such as ‘What are you reacting to?’ (Series 3, Episode 15) ‘If you let me in, I promise I will deal with it’ and ‘How are you are feeling inside?’ These expressions allow the therapeutic qualities of Gok Wan’s voice to transpire and enable his subjects to feel safe enough to reflect on their inner thoughts and feelings in relation to their bodies. This is demonstrated in the case of Sonya (*HTLGN* Series 3, Episode 1), a ballet teacher who hates her body and whose self-loathing has affected her marriage to the point where she is contemplating divorce. Starting from the mirror sequence of the makeover procedure:

**Sonya:** I can’t really look at myself, to be honest. It’s just horrible ... I just want to be somebody else or somebody in a different body. That’s what I really want, to be in a different body. I don’t like it.

**Gok Wan:** If you could change it all right now. If I could just wave a wand and say, right, ‘there you go, there is your ballerina’s body’; would you do it?

**Sonya:** Without a doubt. I could just miraculously change bits, but then I'm not sure I'd be happy. I want to be happy with who I am, and just get on with living it.

After Sonya successfully completes the mirror process, Gok Wan then leads her through the creative process of the makeover procedure which again involves the reconfiguration of her own clothing and the playful exchanges of dressing up, thus enabling her to develop a new appreciation of her own body and self. Sonya gains a new level of body confidence with her clothes on, achieved through her new-found awareness of her silhouette. Then, as part of the makeover procedure, Gok Wan changes the emphasis onto the importance of the female subject feeling confident whilst also naked, thus avoiding the chance of building the subject's confidence solely on the basis of clothes.

For that reason, the next makeover task that Gok Wan sets out for Sonya entails taking part in her very own naked photo shoot. Once her hair and makeup are completed, Sonya enters into the room/theatrical setting wearing only a white robe. Before removing her robe, Sonya is placed on a 'couch' with the assistance of Gok Wan (Figure 41). When properly in place, Gok removes the robe from her and Sonya poses lying 'naked' on the couch where only the side of her body and her back are exposed to the lens (Figure 42). The picture is always revealed at the end of the makeover in a black and white print, with a particular focus on the face of the subject rather the body, thus capturing the self-confidence of being naked.



*Figure 41: Gok Wan disrobes Sonya and positions her 'on the couch'*



*Figure 42: Sonya completes her naked photoshoot challenge*

Once the photo shoot is over, Sonya is found lying upright on the side of the couch wearing her white robe again, while Gok is seated beside her and facing her (Figure 43). Here, it is important to comment on the presence of the couch, which not only

indicates the therapeutic style of the photo shoot but which also signifies the beginning of Sonya's self-reflective process during and after the therapeutic photo challenge.

Here, I would like to comment briefly on the concept of phototherapy. Doug Stewart (1979:42) defines the term phototherapy as 'the use of photography ... [in order] to facilitate psychological growth and therapeutic change'. The use of photography as a methodological tool has been incorporated in many psychotherapeutic and counselling practices in order to facilitate the client/artist/patient reflective process. This process is highly 'creative', since the arranging of the setting, assembling the staging, incorporating the right props as well as positioning the body to express emotions is a significant feature of this process. The use of 'therapeutic photography can be used as a target to learn to express oneself' (Halkola, 2013:20). Therefore, it can be noted that Sonya in the therapeutic photo process is enabled to get closely in touch with her feelings, to reflect on what she has learned during the makeover procedural process and to find the space where she can learn to express herself and come to her own interpretations and self-realisation, as the following extracts will illustrate.

I will pause here to comment on the 'black and white' that captures Sonya's naked body-confidence experience 'on the couch' (Figure 42). It is my view that the 'black and white' of Sonya's photo is suggestive of the integration of unconscious (black) and conscious (white) mind, which is a basic process that takes place in dreams. Evidently, the depiction of Sonya lying 'on the couch', and the symbolic representation of dream work through the depiction of the 'black and white', is

illustrative of the psychoanalytic setting and method, as stated in Chapter 2. However, distinct from *Changing Room*'s framework where the participants narrated their dreams out on the street, in the *HTLGN* makeover setting the couch has moved back into the private space/room/setting, with the notion of dreams being symbolically suggested through the makeover photo rather than verbally articulated by the participant. Once Sonya completes her photo shoot challenge, Gok Wan invites Sonya to sit 'on the couch' beside him and emotionally reflect on her experience (Figure 43):

**Gok Wan:** How are you are feeling inside, honestly?



*Figure 43: Sonya reflects on her therapeutic photo experience*

**Sonya:** Quite proud of myself ... You know what I've learnt today more than anything, is that the most terrifying thing you

could possibly think of doing, if you just do it, it's never as bad, never, ever, ever. It kind of releases all this tension in you and you think actually, 'I wonder what else I could do in my life'. You don't actually have to live your life looking in the mirror thinking, 'I hate what I see'. You don't have to do that. You have made a huge impact ... on my life.

**Gok Wan:** That's very nice to hear.

...

**Sonya:** ...[B]efore I came to *How To Look Good Naked*, I do not think I had smiled for about a month ... Now, I smile all the time.

...

**Sonya:** Before we started this show we had divorce papers in the house ...

**Gok Wan:** ... How's that affecting Alex? (Sonya's son)

**Sonya:** He's going to have two parents; he has to have ... two parents. And the divorce papers ... In the bin!

**Gok Wan:** That's because your body confidence and confidence with being a person has suddenly pushed your entire family together again.

**Sonya:** Without a doubt! ... It's so great. Thank you. I love you.

*Gok Wan tears up and hugs Sonya warmly.*

What becomes evident in this makeover narrative is that the ‘holding’ qualities of Gok’s voice allow Sonya to express her feelings and reflectively to make sense of her emotions, thus arriving at her own interpretations about her past, present and future in relation to her inner and outer worlds.

The depiction of Sonya talking about and making sense of her self-experiences ‘on the couch’ allows her to arrive at her own interpretation of what she has learned and/or discovered about herself through the makeover process. This marks her ‘true self’, her authenticity, and confirms the popularised notion of ‘talk’ as therapy in finding resolution of emotional conflicts and gaining new insights of inner self-experience.

Arriving at one’s own interpretation is central to psychoanalytic thinking and practice. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud linked the meaning of the term ‘interpretation’, to the explanation of hidden meaning, of symptoms, dreams, actions and thoughts. ‘Interpretation, in its simplest form, entails making conscious what was formerly unconscious’ (Gabbard, 2005:102). Psychoanalytic interpretation is ‘an act of illuminating personal meaning’ (Stolorow, 1994:43) and is always an individual matter. In the analytic setting, psychoanalytic interpretation helps the patient to put feelings into words. By articulating experience in terms of emotions, the individual achieves self-cohesion on the way towards self-knowledge.

This sequence reveals the therapeutic gains of Gok Wan’s voice and presence within the makeover space. It is Gok Wan’s holding capacity of his voice that



allows his female subject, as in the case of Sonya, to gather herself and voice subjective experiences in relation to herself and others that before might have been challenging to admit, face, express or even recollect. Therefore, it can be argued that Gok Wan's voice facilitates and builds a safe space where his subject can feel strong and confident enough to face challenging aspects of previous and/or current self-experiences. Gok's subjects become consciously aware by finding their voice to express themselves and to interpret for themselves their own subjective life experience.

Karpf's observation is useful here: 'Finding one's voice - speaking out for the first time on a subject that preoccupies or impassions one – is a powerful experience, with the capacity to alter one's view of oneself and one's place in the world. Many people believe that releasing emotions through the voice can be healing' (Karpf, 2006:131). In the makeover context, as seen in the case of Sonya, voicing emotions and displaying feelings as well as listening to one's own voice aloud can have a therapeutic effect as it enables self-interpretation, which then can lead to a better self-understanding. Such an observation links back to the discussions in Chapter 3 about the makeover experience 'holding' a new postfeminist value. It opens up space where women's subjective experiences of postfeminist notions of femininity can be safely voiced, emotionally understood and culturally acknowledged.

Having recognised the 'holding' value of Gok Wan's voice, in the following section I will provide psychoanalytic commentary on the importance of Gok Wan's tactility and his use of physical holding, which, together with his voice,

allows him to get closer to the female subjects and for them to feel comfortable in his presence.

### **Gok Wan's comforting touch**

Touch can be nurturing, comforting and warm. Tactile communication forms an elaborate, powerful medium of communication and leads to a deeper intimacy and a 'tranquil quiet sense of well-being' (Balint, 1952:231). Stern writes: 'The ultimate magic of attachment is touch. And this magic enters through the skin' (Stern, 1990:99). For Fosshage (2000), tactile stimulation has profound effects both physiologically and behaviourally. Touch, like other senses, can trigger important memories of past events and communication, and is vitally important for survival and a sense of well-being as well as generating trust, intimacy and love. Ashley Montagu writes that:

The languages of the senses, in which all of us can be socialized, are capable of enlarging our appreciation and of deepening our understanding of each other and the world in which we live. Chief among these languages is touching. The communications we transmit through touch constitute the most powerful means of establishing human relationships, the foundation of experience. (Montagu, 1986: vx)

In the makeover space of *HTLGN*, Gok Wan's tactile approach reveals the psychological importance of the pleasant and nourishing sensation experienced through touch, as well as offering soothing and comfort to his subjects in times of anguish.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the female subjects within the makeover space tend to internalise fragments of their body into bad-part objects, through the mechanism of ‘splitting’, thus revealing a direct frustration with and disgust toward themselves. One such case is shown in the episode that introduces 59-year-old Angela (Season 3, Episode 4), whose most hated body part is her arms. The importance of touch becomes apparent in this example, as my analysis will show:

**Gok Wan:** Talk me through what parts of your body you hate the most.

**Angela:** ... I think what I probably hate the most are my upper arms.

**Gok Wan:** OK. Just lift your arm for me then.

**Angela:** Oh!!! (Feeling anxious at the sight of her arm in her reflection).

**Gok Wan:** How does it feel with me touching it?

**Angela:** Surprisingly nice, actually. (tranquil tone of voice)

**Gok Wan:** ...Why do you think that is?

**Angela:** ... Maybe because people generally don’t do it, but it feels okay.



*Figure 44: Angela reacts with pleasure to Gok Wan's touch*

It is evident that in this makeover moment Gok Wan's maternal touch offers a really soothing experience for Angela after feeling distressed in the mirror moment, and especially in an instant when she is revealing her hatred towards this part of her body. Here, Gok Wan's tender touch on Angela's much-hated body-part intensifies a feel-good sensation, thus creating a pleasurable affirmation of reality and this arguably reminds her of a source of goodness that exists in the body when it is touched.

Here, one can comment that when there is contact with the skin, intimacy increases and intensifies, sharing occurs, and the experience is deep. Bonding occurs as a result of an innate need for intimate contact, mainly with the mother. Depending on the quality of the touch, the parent provides comfort and affirmation, and a sense of self is derived from early experiences of the presence of touch (McGuirk, 2012; Zur and Nordmarken, 2011). Sensitive, gentle and loving touch gets imprinted, helping the infant as they grow to reach out and touch others in that

same way throughout their lifetime. These early infantile experiences are echoed in the makeover process through the ways in which Gok Wan comforts his female participants through touch during the overwhelming and emotionally challenging moments of their naked experience. His affirming and comforting touch enables the participants to reach out toward new subjective experiences of the body, which have the capacity to open up space leading towards self-growth.

Such a reading leads me to the observation that Gok Wan's comforting and affirming touch could hold therapeutic potential by facilitating self-experience. First, though, I will examine the use of touch in the psychotherapeutic situation as a therapeutic tool that offers comfort, reassurance and affirmation. There is a complexity of ethical guidelines around the use of touch in psychotherapeutic practices and its boundaries and taboos. Carlos Durana argues that:

The touch taboo has kept many therapists from using touch as a therapeutic tool. This taboo has perhaps resulted from a cultural stance that misinterprets touch as erotic ... Proponents of the touch taboo claim that touch will disrupt the client's ability to work through transference issues and will dilute the therapist's ability to tolerate negative transference ... Touch beyond a formal handshake is seen ... as a boundary crossing that places the therapists on a slippery slope towards the gratification of the therapist's or client's needs one which can lead to the arousal of sexual feelings that may in turn be acted upon. This is perhaps the strongest basis for the origin of the touch taboo in psychotherapy. (Durana, 1998:270-271)

It is clear, then, that touch is a serious taboo in the therapeutic setting. However, here, I would like to emphasise the therapeutic importance of touch and for this reason I will turn to other psychoanalytic works to explore the place that the physical/non-sexual touch holds in the 'clinical setting'. In the psychoanalytic

situation, Elizabeth Mintz (1969) delineates four possible meanings of touch: direct libidinal gratification, symbolic mothering, conveying a sense of being accepted, and conveying a sense of reality. While the first, she argues, is problematic in a therapeutic situation, the other three meanings and uses of touch can be quite facilitative of growth in the analytic process. As Fosshage (2000) reveals, research has amply demonstrated that many psychotherapists, including psychoanalytic therapists, touch patients in order to express support, reassurance, warmth, caring, protection or for other therapeutically motivated reasons (Kardener, Fuller, and Mensh, 1973; Patterson, 1973; Holroyd and Brodsky, 1977; Gelb, 1982; Milakovich, 1992; Horton et al., 1995). James Fosshage argues that in a clinical setting, '[t]ouch fostered a feeling of a stronger bond, closeness, and a sense that the therapist really cares, thereby facilitating increased trust and openness ... touch communicated acceptance and enhanced their self-esteem' (2000:30). Although Gok Wan's function in the makeover situation does not replicate the one provided by trained analysts in a clinical setting, however it can be argued that Gok Wan's nurturing touch facilitates similar intimacy and builds trust between himself and his female subject, thus allowing her to get 'in touch' with herself and her body again.

In the following extract, what becomes apparent is not only the role that Gok Wan's touch plays in the makeover process but also the way he explains the importance of touch to his female subject as a significant tool that will allow them to discover their own body and its potential. In this context it is interesting to note the case of the mother and daughter (Series 4, Episode 1), Margaret (mother) and Maria (daughter), who both hold negative views about their bodies. The episode

reveals that Margaret's body-related anxieties were initiated by her mother (Maria's grandmother), who instructed her from a very young age to always cover her body and not to touch it. The following extract is from the mirror sequence of the makeover procedure:

**Margaret:** My body has been an issue all my life. Even when I was slim.

...

**Margaret:** ... [my partner] in 42 years of marriage he's never seen me naked. Ever.

**Gok Wan:** Ever? Not even once?

**Margaret:** Nope.

...



*Figure 45: Margaret reflects on her body-struggles in front of her daughter.*

**Margaret:** My parents were very strict and my mum was always one of those who said (Sobbing) ... that you must not

touch your body in any way. You must keep yourself covered up. That's what I had all me life ...

...

In the following scene, Gok Wan asks Margaret and Maria to complete a task whilst still in their underwear as they have just completed the mirror task:

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** Mother and daughter can't get past how they see their own bodies. So, I have a plan that will help them appreciate what they've got. No peeking allowed.

Gok Wan blindfolds them both (mother and daughter) and guides them into a room where there are two other women in their underwear standing in the middle of a white studio room (Figure 46).



*Figure 46: The Hide and seek challenge*



Margaret and Maria are neither aware of the presence of the other two women nor of the purpose of the blindfolding task. Once securely blindfolded, Gok Wan places Margaret and Maria a step behind each woman:

**Gok Wan:** Right, so, girls, slowly put your hands in front of you.

Margaret and Maria both raise their arms slowly and their hands touch the naked back of a woman's body who stands in front of them (Figure 47).



*Figure 47: Margaret and Maria experience touch on  
a naked body*

**Gok Wan:** Margaret, what you can feel?

**Margaret** (in an amazed voice): A lady's body ...

**Gok Wan:** What's it feels like to feel another woman's flesh?

**Margaret:** It's not as frightening as you think! ... It feels nice!

...

The purpose of the task is a psychological exercise that Gok Wan has created as part of the process of building the participants' own body awareness. By introducing touch together with playfulness, Gok Wan opens up new spaces and invites Margaret and Maria to take part in new body-related experiences, whilst offering them the opportunity to discover new meanings, symbols and associations through touch with their own bodies. The significance of body discovery through touching another woman's body becomes evident by Margaret's 'astounded' reaction in saying 'A lady's body ...'. The introduction of touch along with playfulness can be beneficial during this process since it evokes laughter whilst breaking down defences, initiating experience and a sense of self-discovery.

Touch can be a component of new experience as it offers the opportunity for exploration and discovery, although as a consequence it will also include some painful re-experiencing. For Margaret in *HTLGN*, the vision of the uncovered body, as revealed in the extract above, was a forbidden act that was imposed by her mother. By blindfolding both mother and daughter, Gok Wan opens up a 'potential space' (Winnicott, 1971) and through the initiation of 'play', he enables them to (re)create new meanings for and associations with the naked body through the sense of touch. Here, it is important to stress that, through blindfolding, the sense of touch is intensified for the female subjects, heightening the tactile sensory experience and occluding the visual one, through which most women will experience their bodies. This occasion signifies the beginning of a playful and

creative experience of the body, and, according to Winnicott (1971), play leads to the discovery of the self through accepting one's own individuality, a creative opportunity that leads to the emerging possibility of self-love. Consequently, accepting one's individuality and building a capacity for self-love through body acceptance constitutes an underlying objective of the *HTLGN* discourse and signifies the effectiveness of its procedural method.

The blindfold also introduces the presence of 'playfulness' and implies the participants' trust towards Gok Wan and their ability to feel safe in his presence. The blindfold touch task allows for mother and daughter to gain a better understanding about one's body in relation to the other, accentuating their experiencing of the body and potentially enabling them to develop self-love and body acceptance, which is the 'learning outcome' of the makeover discourse. The blindfolding of the female subjects brings to mind a symbolic depiction of 'hide and seek' play. 'It is a joy to be hidden but a disaster not to be found' (Winnicott 1963b:186). Dana Amir (no date) observes that 'the hide-and-seek play, which is Winnicott's most familiar metaphor for the dialectics at the basis of human existence, enacts the tension between one's wish to be found and the wish never to be discovered'. The eternal hide-and-seek play takes place within transitional space, enabling one's mobility between 'me' and 'not-me', between imagination and reality. The play between subjectively creating and finding the object constitutes the performative work of 'coming-into-being' of the child. In the case of Margaret and Maria, being blindfolded or 'hidden' enables them to discover what already exists - their bodies - and a new experience of the 'sense' of self and/or a new sense of object relating. That discovery 'comes into being' through

the experience of searching and touching the bodies of the other two female subjects who were placed there by Gok Wan for that exact purpose.<sup>27</sup>

Here it is important to draw attention to the fact that Gok Wan initiates and carries forward the makeover experience with the mother and daughter jointly, which draws attention to the importance of building a strong emotional experience and bodily relatedness between them. When mother and child have a close bodily relationship, it forms the basis of good feelings about the self, a feeling of bodily connectedness and sociality, and this facilitates a feeling of self-esteem (Montagu, 1986:265). In order to achieve this, Gok Wan sets a makeover challenge where the backdrop is based on the first and last time anyone witnessed Margaret's nakedness:

**Margaret:** Last time anybody saw me naked was when I'd had Darryl and I had a salt bath for my stitches and that's the first time anybody's seen me naked ... he is 40 now.

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** So, 40 years on, I'm recreating bath time, but with a Gok difference!

Therefore, as part of the makeover process, Gok Wan sets a challenge for both Margaret and Maria to pose naked in a bathroom setting for their very own 'naked' photo shoot. Margaret and Maria's profiles face the wall, whilst their backs are exposed to the camera lens. Between them is a sash window that looks down onto

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<sup>27</sup> This observation raises interesting questions about the role of the gaze in shaping female self-perception and this is a topic to be pursued in the post-doctoral phase of my research.

an exotic and private oasis of trees. The shutters have been removed from the window to reveal the exotic paradise, thus suggestive of Margaret's and Maria's presence as part of the scenery, like a biblical scene. In the middle of the room and behind them is located a big white bathtub filled with bubble bath and with red rose petals floating on the surface (Figure 49). While Margaret stands comfortable and content in the white robe, daughter Maria starts feeling anxious about the demands of the 'naked' task and becomes tearful. Gok Wan immediately offers comfort and reassurance to Maria and purposely goes on to remove Margaret's white robe first, before Maria's.

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** This is Margaret's perfect chance to be the body-confidence role model that Maria's been missing all of her life.

When Gok Wan assists Margaret in removing her white robe, Maria beams as she witnesses her mother standing and looking confident and comfortable in the nude. As a result, and with no hesitation, Maria, feeling visibly encouraged by her mother's attitude, feels more content and removes her robe. Margaret and Maria respond with a smile to each other, which marks the start of the photo shoot.



*Figure 48: Margaret and Maria's 'naked' bath time*

The newfound confidence in both Margaret and Maria is then captured by the camera lens, as they stand at the side of the bathroom, next to a fireplace with a rectangular mirror above it. Once again, the depiction of the mirror in this makeover moment is indicative of the self-reflection that is about to take place. However, in this instant, it is Maria who reflects on her mother's presence and confidence during the photo shoot:



*Figure 49: Mother and daughter reflecting on their naked experience*

**Maria:** The fact that you were really confident and you just whipped your gown off ... I thought, ‘Well, if my mum can do it, I can do it.’

**Margaret:** ... I am proud of her!

As seen in the makeover context, the notion of touch plays an important role in the (re)discovery and (re)experience of one’s self and body. Psychoanalytically, the presence of touch plays a significant role in the development of the subjective self as well as in our relationships with others. In object relations writing, the mother’s touch provides the infant with a safe ‘holding environment’ and fosters a feeling of a stronger bond and closeness, whilst facilitating trust and openness. In addition, the presence of touch has the capacity to communicate acceptance and enhances one’s self-esteem, as demonstrated throughout this case example.

Aside from his tactile approach towards his female subjects and the ‘holding’ qualities of his voice that allows them to fall back and face their fears and insecurities during the mirror sequence and throughout their makeover process, it is also Gok Wan’s empathetic attunement and sensitivity towards his subjects’ body loathing experience that distinguishes him from his competitors and makes him more well-liked than Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine in the popular British makeover culture.

### **Gok Wan’s capacity for empathy**

Gok Wan’s capacity for empathy towards his subject’s body loathing derives from his own personal experiences of body hatred and his battles with weight gain from a young age. In 2010, he published his autobiography under the title *Through Thick and Thin* (2010). Here, Gok Wan reflects on his complex relationship and issues with food from a very young age, his earlier memories of his own ‘naked’ mirror moment and body loathing practices as well as his drastic weight loss with the use of laxatives that later on developed into an eating disorder. The following extended quotation consists of selected autobiographical narratives and segments from Gok Wan’s published autobiography and offers an insight into those experiences, which can be used to evaluate his personal capacity for empathy towards the women of *HTLGN*<sup>28</sup>:

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<sup>28</sup> This lengthy biographical extract is necessary for this chapter development in gaining a psychoanalytic insight of Gok Wan’s empathetic stance towards his participants’ reflective narratives since they offer a detailed account of the expert’s former troubled experiences with his weight struggles. Moreover, these extensive narratives will contribute further in the psycho-cultural development of this thesis in addressing the cultural expansion of the Gok Wan phenomenon and efficacy of his *HTLGN* method and practices beyond the confined space of the makeover, as Chapter 6 argues.



I don't know how I got fat ... I don't remember going from thin boy to a fat boy with boobs. (9) ... [B]y the time I reached the age of thirteen I was nearly six foot. I was grossly overweight ... certainly over twelve stone ... I considered myself the most unattractive person in the world. I used to daydream about how I would look if I had the magical powers to transform myself. I would be slim and good-looking, and have a flat chest with pecs instead of small breasts. I'd have a taut stomach with a neat button right in the middle, instead of one lost deep within rolls of flesh. My hands would be strong and lean instead of chubby, ... I was desperate to feel attractive and fit in ... my self-esteem plummeted further, and my lack of confidence made me a sitting target for the bullies (49-50) ... It was a constant drip-drip of whispered insults, of quiet little sneers, a stream of mockery and name calling, and it seemed that everyone was at it ... all I could do was listen until the words echoed constantly in my mind and I began to believe they were right: I was stupid, worthless, fat, ugly, greedy, gay ... (51) ... they wore me down, destroying my confidence and making me hate myself. (53) ... [M]y body had grown even bigger and my weight had become an all-consuming issue. I was disgusted at how I looked and even showering was a painful and embarrassing task. I would run the hot water for at least ten minutes before getting undressed so that the bathroom mirrors would steam up and prevent me catching a glimpse of my fat body ... How could anyone find me attractive if I couldn't even look at myself? (76-77) ... [Entering into the Central School of Speech and Drama] I had taken one look at everyone else and instantly felt like I didn't fit in ... they all seemed to be very beautiful with perfect skin and tousled, trendy hair, and of course they were slim. All of this made me feel deeply insecure (127) ... I touched my chest with both hands ... I just want to be slim, I want to feel beautiful ... I loathed my body. I was embarrassed by it, hating the way it moved differently from everyone else's. I felt strongly that my size stood between me and success [in becoming an actor], and I wanted to feel attractive, just once, so I could have the same opportunities as everybody else. I even blamed my body for stopping me from getting an education ... [and] for never letting me find love. Who could possibly find this lumpy, fat mess attractive if I couldn't even bear to look at it? Everyone around was so beautiful. ... I convinced myself ... I was going to be thin; and the thinner I was, the more successful I would be. By now my brain had been programmed to believe that the only way I was going to achieve at Central [School of Speech and Drama] was if I was as skinny as the models in the magazines and the students on my course. I began to diet and of course I had no idea about

how to diet healthily (136-137). ... My food intake began to get smaller and ... I started keeping a food diary and every day wrote in it what I had eaten and how many calories I had consumed that day. Each day I tried to eat a little less than I had the day before. (138) ... but the weight loss was *still* too slow. I decided it would be better if I ate as little as I possibly could – just enough to function on. And I started to take laxatives. (141) ... I began seeing big changes in my body. My face slimmed first. It was like watching a piece of fruit decompose as it changed shape. ... My changing body thrilled me. Now I'd had a taste of being slim, I wanted more. ... I would see young girls in the street, no older than twelve, whose slender bodies had not yet developed into a woman's, and I envied them. ... Anorexia had taken hold of me. ... I felt in control for the first time ever, and I was morphing into the person I had always wanted to be. My clothes hung off me like rags and the constant hunger was making me high. But as the weight dropped off ... my dosage of laxatives increased. (143) ... I started to become obsessed with my reflection. I would stand naked in front of the mirror and pull my sagging skin in ways that made me look thinner (148). The fat, wobbling, twenty-one stone me had vanished, and in its place was a new and odd-looking version. I was emaciated ... I arrived back [home] a tired, soulless skeleton. ... I didn't have the strength to fight any more. I was exhausted and beaten ... 'I can't do this anymore, I said, breaking down and weeping. 'I need help. I can't go on like this.' ... [My sister responded] '... We're going to see a doctor...' I felt a huge relief ... surely everything was going to be alright. (160)

Throughout this narrative, Gok Wan discloses his inner and outer emotional struggles and experiences of body hatred, his emotional conflict with his weight and his battle with anorexia as a result of social pressures and school bullying, which reveals the 'authenticity' of his emotional understanding towards female body related anxieties within the *HTLGN* discourse. Sennett (1977) argues that the notion of the authentic self and the charismatic public persona rest on what the person reveals about his or her life experience on a personal and emotional level. Additionally, and by drawing on the work offered by Richard Sennett (1977) and Nikolas Rose (1999), Yates argues that 'charismatic public figures are now

increasingly defined by displays of intimacy and a perception that they are revealing aspects of the ‘true’ authentic personality’ (2011:73).

Gok Wan’s emotional autobiographical revelation allows him to be seen by his subjects and viewers as a highly empathetic and emotionally attuned figure, aware of the emotional complexities that are a result of low body confidence, body dissatisfaction and/or body-loathing. For instance, in his interview with Hadley Freeman in *The Guardian* (2008), Gok Wan reveals his complete awareness that his capacity for empathy towards his female makeover subjects derives from his own personal experience. Gok Wan’s discourses emerged at just the right time in terms of the UK’s cultural turn towards the therapy/therapeutic culture:

**Gok Wan:** I know what it’s like to look in the mirror and absolutely hate what’s looking back at you, and to pick up a fashion magazine and think, why can’t I look like that? It’s not fair. (Freeman, 2008)

Gok Wan’s emotional authenticity of ‘been there’ (Rice, 2011), as revealed in his autobiographical narratives and media interviews, not only publicises his empathy towards his makeover subjects, but also validates his position as an ‘expert’ within the popular media landscape. He is someone who recognises popular female body-related troubles as well as someone who mentors and guides within the makeover discourse on ‘how to’ overcome those body-related anxieties. As already discussed in Chapter 2, such a claim confirms once again Gok Wan’s place as clear by-product of therapy culture and his media persona as an apparent example of the reconfiguration of his role as a lifestyle expert/host into a ‘charismatic’ figure by employing characteristics stereotypically coded as a mentor/therapist.

Gok Wan's 'feel good' approach and his promotion of his 'self-reflective' practices are illuminated by the fact that his autobiography was published in 2010, the same year when the *HTLGN* series came to a close. Such a link opens up speculation as to whether the cultural space of *HTLGN*, along with the reflective narratives of his female subject's body related troubles, offered a 'potential space' for Gok Wan himself to emotionally revisit and reflect on his former experiences of body loathing and body-related issues, prompting the timely publication of his autobiography.

This is demonstrated in one particular makeover case, when Gok Wan recognises an emotional familiarity with a subject's experiences of dealing with her weight as well as struggling with her weight loss behaviour. This reflective moment takes place with Debbie during the mirror sequence of the makeover procedure. As outlined in Chapter 3, after losing six stones in weight, Debbie expresses her continuing disappointment and unhappiness with her own body image. Despite dieting and slimming down, her body (as Debbie reflects) still does not measure up to the popular images of female body perfection.

Debbie's storyline clearly resonates with Gok Wan's own personal account, thus creating the opportunity for emotional relatedness. As depicted in Figure 10 (when Debbie's case was first introduced in Chapter 3) Gok Wan is seen standing at the side, behind Debbie, and gazes into the mirror looking at the reflection of himself and Debbie. In this makeover instance, Gok Wan steps in front of Debbie and recollects his own body related struggles. At that very moment Gok Wan for a split-second turns and stares at his own reflection in the mirror and then

immediately turns back at Debbie. With his hands placed on the sides of his head Gok Wan reveals how her current body-image dissatisfaction resonates with his own past experiences (Figure 50). Here, Gok Wan's interaction with Debbie is emblematic of the psychoanalytic manifestation of counter-transference in the analytic setting (discussed in Chapter 4) where 'the patient comes to represent some unresolved aspects of a significant relationship in the earlier life of the analyst or therapist' (Casement, 2014:81):



*Figure 50: Gok Wan reflects on his own body related struggles*

**Gok Wan:** I know absolutely first hand how unfair this is; I absolutely do know! Because I am listening to you and I am watching you and I see me, because I was there, and I was BIG, I was 21st and I lost it and I lost 10st. You have got 100% to start liking yourself ... This is about liking the person that is inside and you gonna look in that mirror and you gonna say:

My name is Debbie and regardless of what I look like, I am worthy, I have got a voice, I have got an opinion, I have got a heart and I deserve to like myself and other people to like me!

**Gok Wan (voiceover):** Losing pounds doesn't guarantee happiness and girlfriend I know this first-hand.

Gok Wan's self-reflection on his own experiences within the makeover space allows for the emergence of his shared experiences within the setting and it reveals his capacity to generate a form of emotional relatedness. Gok Wan's 'emotional knowing' (Greenson, 1960) allows for emotional relatedness and shared experience to emerge between himself and the female 'other'. Such a claim reassures us once more of the programme's therapeutic potential and, at the same time, draws attention to Gok Wan's capacity for empathy towards his subject's emotional experience of body loathing. This attribute draws attention towards his charismatic qualities as a makeover expert, thus distinguishing him from his programme competitors.

It is Gok Wan's 'emotional knowing', through his personal experience of body hatred and weight troubles, that enables him to enter into that self-reflective space and consequently to empathise with Debbie's reflective narratives. The latter is echoed also through his biographical narratives, where Gok Wan (2010:345) remarks that if I '[h]ad not starved myself and suffered loneliness and body hatred, I would have never had the kind of empathy I do with people who allow us to tell their stories'.

Empathy is about seeing someone from behind their eyes and for Paul Ornstein (2011:442) empathy is ‘the act of *feeling* oneself and *thinking* oneself into the inner life of another, to understand, both emotionally and cognitively what the other thinks and feels’. In the object relations psychoanalytic framework, the capacity for empathy is explicable through the mechanism of what Klein refers to as ‘projective identification’.

Klein suggests that,

By projecting oneself or part of one's impulses and feelings into another person, an identification with that person is achieved ... the identification is based on attributing to the other person some of one's own qualities. Projection has many repercussions. We are inclined to attribute to other people—in a sense, to put into them—some of our own emotions and thoughts; and it is obvious that it will depend on how balanced or persecuted we are whether this projection is of a friendly or a hostile nature. By attributing part of our feelings to the other person, we understand their feelings, needs, and satisfactions; in other words, we are putting ourselves into the other person's shoes ... The character of projection is, therefore, of great importance in our relations to other people. If the interplay between introjection and projection is not dominated by hostility or over-dependence, and is well balanced, the inner world is enriched and the relations with the external world are improved. (Klein, 1959:252-3)

Gok Wan's empathetic response to his participant narratives, which is enabled through the mechanism of ‘projective identification’, allows him to step into the emotional experience of his subjects and to cognitively, emotionally and psychologically understand them. His former experiences of ‘been there’, of loathing his own body reflection in the mirror, his emotional struggles with obesity and the extreme dieting measures used in an attempt to find happiness and measure

up to popular media body ideals enable him to engage with his subject on a more emotional level. Thus, the mechanism of projective identification that is at play during the subject's mirror sequence, as seen in the case of Debbie, opens up a space for Gok Wan to contemplate his own experiences. Gok Wan's active self-reflective participation in the 'mirror' moment makes it possible for him to also attain a therapeutic experience. This demonstrates the therapeutic value of *HTLGN* not only for the makeover subjects and for the viewers as an extension of them, but also for the 'expert' himself. The notion of the 'expert' as omnipotent is undone here and this signals a shift away from other makeover formats. The latter point supports my earlier discussion of the therapeutic potential of the makeover space as consisting not just of the trope of the couch and a confessional moment of relatedness but rather as a 'therapeutic' phenomenon requiring relatedness between those involved - namely the makeover 'expert' and the makeover subject.

### **Gok Wan: The *naked* man in the mirror**

In order to explore further this therapeutic possibility for Gok Wan within the makeover space, I want to turn to Gok Wan's radio interview with Kirsty Young on *Desert Island Discs* (2010) on BBC Radio 4 where he discloses his first 'naked mirror' experience, which appears to share a common ground with the 'naked' mirror sequence in the makeover space of *HTLGN*:

**Gok Wan:** One of my earliest memories that I remember of deciding to lose the weight was being completely naked; [I] sat on my bed and at the end of my bed, there was a big old beautiful wardrobe with this great ornate mirror on it, and it makes me feel quite sad when I say this, but I remember looking in the mirror and thinking, that wardrobe is so



beautiful apart from the reflection - and that was really tricky.  
... Then I decided that's it! ... you got to do it, you have got to  
lose the weight and it is the only way you are going to feel  
successful or happy and I couldn't be more wrong. Because it  
was not about the weight; it was a cry for help.

(*Desert Island Discs*, 2010)

Gok's descriptive narrative of his earlier 'mirror' moment clearly parallels the one that has been created and developed as part of the makeover process in his programmes. For instance, Gok Wan stands naked in his bedroom in front of his wardrobe/mirror and negatively scrutinises his naked body reflection. In *HTLGN*, the female subject is asked to remove her clothes and stand 'naked' in front of the mirror. The subject always holds a negative perception of her body and often the main issue under discussion is body mass and weight, as is also the case in Gok's interview narratives.

Even though this similarity is evident, there is nevertheless an apparent disparity that exists between those two experiences and this is rooted in the concept and availability or not of 'holding' and 'mirroring' in the mirror reflection. In the makeover setting, once the female subject has negatively examined her body and expressed her frustration and hatred towards it, Gok Wan 'mirrors' back, in a compassionate and 'holding' function, the emotional states that emerge in the subject's reflective account, and he makes available new meanings for her to make sense of her emotional subjective states. In order to make those meanings available to his subject, Gok Wan offers his own interpretation of the subject's analysis and emotional reaction to her own body image reflection. To do this, he starts by saying 'I will tell you now what I see in this mirror'. Gok Wan often, as part of his analytical response to the subjects' reflective accounts, has a tendency to identify

the emotional resonance and beginnings of the subject's body loathing experiences.

This is further exemplified in the case of Clare (Series 3, Episode 15) which is emblematic of the type of 'mirroring'/analytical explanation employed by Gok Wan:

Wan:

**Gok Wan:** What are you feeling right now?

...

**Clare:** Exposed, fairly horrified, if I am honest.

**Gok Wan:** I understand exposed, why horrified?

**Clare:** I just don't like what I see. This is a view I normally tried to avoid, I don't like looking at it ... Because I just feel fat and ugly.

...

**Gok Wan:** Who do you talk to this about Clare?

**Clare:** I don't really discuss it that much, because it feels like it's my problem, it's not anyone else's problem, it is me.

**Gok Wan:** But maybe that is the problem, maybe it's the fact that you haven't spoken to anybody about this and that you are dealing with this completely on your own. Which basically means you're having a relationship with your body on your own that is quite unhealthy ...

For the duration of this reflective process, Gok Wan's presence is also visibly reflected in the three full-length mirrors (Figure 51) along with Clare.



*Figure 51: The HTLGN mirrors on the theatre stage<sup>29</sup>*

While Clare is negatively scrutinising her body, Gok Wan holds a firm stance behind Clare and his emotionally attuned gaze is fixated on Clare's facial expression (Figure 52) and more particularly on her intense stare when scrutinising her body. When in dialogue with Clare, Gok's presence remains visible in the reflection of the mirrors and when Clare responds to his queries, she directly responds to him by gazing back at his reflection.

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<sup>29</sup> This is a very interesting *HTLGN* screenshot as the mirror sequence has moved out of the usual studio space into the theatre and the audience is positioned as in the role of the spectator. Here, the notion of gaze becomes apparent and significant in this context, as it suggests the dynamic of the audience as active participators, and their engagement with the characters on the stage opens up space to observe, relate and arrive and/or make their own interpretations. This is an interesting concept that I intend to follow up in the post-doctoral phase.



*Figure 52: Gok Wan's affective gaze is visible in Claire's mirror reflection*

The possibility of looking at Clare's reflection in the mirror allows Gok Wan to comfort and reassure his subject, since he is 'looking' exactly at what she is looking at, indicating an attuned mirroring. In Kohut's (1977) thinking, this moment involves 'the confirming/mirroring process'. Here, mirroring is a process that requires accurate empathy, i.e. knowing, absorbing what the child is feeling, communicating back recognition, and acceptance of this. Such a process becomes evident in the makeover moment through Gok Wan's interpretation of Clare's feelings concerning her body and the way in which Gok Wan is making available new meanings and reflections for Clare to take on, thus providing for her the necessary 'holding environment'. According to the object relations psychoanalytic perspective, this mirroring moment is a symbolic reflection of what Winnicott (1971) writes about as the importance of the mother's mirror function.

In his paper ‘The Mirror Role of Mother and Family in Child Development’, Winnicott writes about a stage of emotional development when the infant still perceives the mother as part of himself. Therefore, the ‘environment-mother’ whose role is to ‘continue to be herself, to be empathetic towards her infant, to be there to receive spontaneous gesture, and to be pleased’ (Winnicott, 1963b:76) performs her holding and handling function in a good-enough way, and thus presents herself as an object in such a way which will respect ‘the infant’s legitimate experience of omnipotence’ (Winnicott, 1971:112). As depicted in Clare’s mirror frame, Gok Wan adopts the role of the ‘environment – mother’ where, in a gentle and empathetic stance, he is able to tolerate his subject’s frustrations and he allows them to be felt by him in a constructive way in an attempt to begin a process of (re)evaluating and (re)examining her body related frustrations and anxieties which later develop into self-growth and body-awareness. This position once again confirms Gok Wan’s charismatic qualities, as he is embracing the role of the makeover expert in a constructive and meaningful way.

For Winnicott, then, mirroring confirms the infant’s self-esteem whatever s/he happens to be doing, whatever his/her needs and responses. In his paper on the mirror role of the mother, Winnicott states:

What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself, in other words the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*. All this is too easily taken for granted. I am asking that this which is naturally done well by mothers who are caring for their babies shall not be taken for granted. I can make my point by going straight over to the case of the baby whose mother reflects her own mood or, worse still, the rigidity of her own defences. In such a case what does the baby see? ...

The baby gets settled in to the idea that when he or she looks, what is seen is the mother's face ... when the average girl studies her face in the mirror she is reassuring herself that the mother-image is there and that the mother can see her and that the mother is en rapport with her. (Winnicott, 1971:112-113, italics in original)

Therefore, the mother's mirroring gaze upon her infant is a founding experience, as it establishes a template in the infant's ego as a site for something good and confirms the infant's place in the world.

The parallels between the psychoanalytic ideas discussed here and the tropes and mechanisms at work in *HTLGN* are clear. However, while this 'mirroring' and 'holding' become available for the female subject because of the actions of the 'good-enough' mother (Gok Wan) in the makeover setting, this very moment is 'absent' in Gok's own personal and reflective narratives, as we saw in his interview recollection about his own naked mirror moment. Gok Wan describes the bedroom setting of his 'naked' mirror experience with a particularly emotionalised reference to the presence of a big old wardrobe furnished with a great 'ornate mirror'.

According to his interview narratives, Gok Wan describes the wardrobe as 'beautiful' apart from the reflection in its mirror, while indicating that the appearance of his 'naked' body in the mirror reflection was 'ugly'. It is important to note here that Gok Wan was alone in this moment: there was no holding presence to absorb and/or make sense of his anxiety in order to make it safe.

Gok Wan's reflective narratives, then, indicate a certain 'absence' and/or 'emptiness' in the 'in-between' space between his 'naked' reflection and the

‘object’ wardrobe. By considering the strong symbolic presence of the wardrobe in this scenario, I interpret Gok Wan’s reference to the position of the ‘wardrobe’ as serving as a psychological object that signifies the symbolic presence of a mother and the position of the ‘ornate mirror on it’ representing the mother’s face. His ‘naked’ narrative indicates a lack and/or the absence of any maternal mirroring, leaving him feeling inadequate without any holding presence to absorb and/or recognise those painful emotions of his that are reflected in the ‘mirror’. Thus he is left unable to recognise his self-worth.

In the context of Gok Wan’s ‘naked’ experience as lacking any maternal ‘holding’ and/or ‘mirroring’, it can be suggested that the makeover space of *HTLGN* and in particular the ‘mirror’ phase can be symbolically interpreted as a reflective recurrence of Gok Wan’s personal experience. Therefore, what was ‘absent’ and/or ‘lacking’ in his mirror experience is ‘present’ in the *HTLGN* setting. This interpretation becomes evident in the good-enough maternal holding and mirroring relation that Gok Wan makes available to his female subjects during their naked mirror experiences through his touch, voice and gaze as well as through his capacity for empathy towards the subject’s expressions of body loathing. Furthermore, Gok Wan’s affective ‘mirroring’ is more profoundly ‘present’ because of his capacity to be seen by the subject in her mirror reflection. Nevertheless, Gok Wan’s availability in the mirror reflection serves a therapeutic function for Gok Wan himself since it opens up the possibility of restoring the ‘absence of mirroring’ that he previously encountered.

When Gok Wan offers his own mirror interpretation in response to his subjects' reflective narratives, it often emotionally resonates with his own personal experience of self-loathing. By adopting the role of the m/other, Gok Wan reveals once again where his capacity of empathy derives from, since he has already experienced these body related troubles, struggles and concerns. For instance, in the case of Debbie, he brings forth his own emotional struggles with being overweight and dieting. In Clare's case, Gok Wan identifies her relationship with her body as 'unhealthy', while at the same time drawing attention to the fact that her own body loathing has led her into loneliness, because of her decision to hide her body-related anxieties from her immediate others. Such analysis resonates with Gok's own previous lonely approach towards his emotional body struggles. For instance, in his autobiography Gok Wan confesses that for a very long time he hid his despair and frustration from his family and friends (Wan, 2010:76-77). In detail, Gok Wan reveals the 'unhealthy' approach he took to cover up his drastic and extreme diet regimes in response to his weight related frustrations, as well as his unrestrained use of laxatives that eventually resulted in the development of an eating disorder and experiences of loneliness (Wan, 2010:141-160).

Another moment when Gok Wan's life experiences emerge in *HTLGN* is shown through the reflective narratives of Alison (Episode 3, Series 3):

**Alison:** I just don't feel any confidence in anything anymore.

I don't feel that I am attractive; I don't feel people want to be my friends. I don't feel anyone wants to go out with me.



**Gok Wan:** I think what's happened is you were told you were short, fat with glasses and I think now you feel very, very lonely. What you are doing is blaming your appearance. But you are an adult now and I promise you, when you start dealing with the idea that you are a beautiful, petite, curvaceous, very well proportioned woman, I guarantee you will be a lot happier.

Here, Gok Wan locates Alison's development of a negative body-image and her lack of confidence as originating in her school days, when she was bullied. Once again, this resonates with his own personal experience of childhood bullying.

In all these cases, Gok Wan makes himself available '*to-be-looked-at ...*' (Mulvey, 1975:11) and 'mirrored' by his female subjects when he is (self-) reflecting on their emotional and body loathing experiences. The presence and availability of the participant's reflection activates a 'cultural experience' for Gok Wan himself that emerges directly from the embodied subjective experiences of his makeover participant. Therefore, the *HTLGN* discourse develops into a 'potential' reflective space for Gok Wan, since the subjects' emotional reactions and narratives reawaken his former unresolved body anxieties. My discussion is supported by Gok Wan's personal reflections in his autobiography. He narrates that he arrived at an emotional realisation that his former body loathing experiences and anxieties were never emotionally reflected upon nor worked through. Gok's emotional recognition of this process also emerges during his account of a female subject's *HTLGN* mirror sequence:

I stood in front of the mirror with my lady and asked her to strip down; I saw the fear and embarrassment in her eyes. She tensed and tears sprang to her eyes, and I could see the struggle inside her. She agreed to do it, though, and, as she broke down in front of her reflection and told me that she hated her body, her pain hit me hard. I knew exactly how she was feeling. I put my arms around her, feeling every part of her anguish and fear inside me just as my own had been ten years before. I was taken back to the most difficult and awful time of life in an instant – I was reliving the pain I'd tried so hard to forget. (Gok Wan, 2010: 262)

Once again the mechanism of 'projective identification' is at play here and it is exactly what is at work in the above extract. Gok Wan feels her pain and identifies with it, tapping into his own residue of experience to structure this exchange. His account of 'I knew exactly how she was feeling' reveals not only his emotional capacity for empathy but also his 'emotional knowing' about being in their position. Gok Wan discloses this moment of 'emotional knowing' and awakening by himself in his autobiographical narratives, suggesting that *HTLGN* may also have enabled Gok Wan himself to work through his own experiences in a way that chimes with therapeutic encounters. The makeover setting becomes then for Gok Wan a space of 'transitional' awareness that offers him the possibility of engaging in a process of self-knowledge leading towards the interpretation of self-experiences. As noted above, arriving at one's own interpretation and making sense of unresolved issues or even becoming consciously aware of them is paramount in the analytic setting and signals the efficacy of the working-through process. For Gok Wan, then, the *HTLGN* setting that he creatively assembled for his female participants has *transitioned* into an 'intermediate space of [therapeutic] experience'.

Gok Wan highlights the roots of these experiences during his *Desert Island Discs* interview:

I had no idea at all that the emotion was going to be there and the tone was going to be there, something clicked inside my head, and at that point I hadn't told the press or told anyone that I used to be big and I almost went into a trance, it was like a memory of how I felt about my body. I never expected that to happen. (Gok Wan, cited in Young, 2010)

Here, we also see that the emotional texture of the presenter's experience was unexpected/unanticipated, adding weight to the notion that he, too, is participating in the emotional work that is taking place. Gok Wan confirms that the space of *HTLGN* was a 'potential [reflective] space' for him since it activated his former emotions and some unresolved questions, as well as allowing him to make his own interpretations of those experiences. As a result, 'the mirror' in this makeover space holds a reflective value and creates a 'shared' reflective space for both expert and participants, allowing them to merge and to mutually work through their unresolved emotional experiences and anxieties. This leads me to consider the presence of the mirror in the makeover discourse and how the mirror eventually replaces the 'couch' as the representative object for both Gok Wan and his female subjects, thus giving rise once more to the therapeutic qualities of the makeover space of *HTLGN*.

To conclude, whereas Chapter 2 highlighted the role of the couch in the genre, this chapter has revealed various symbols of the therapeutic encounter at play in *HTLGN*. For instance, the 'holding' and therapeutic qualities of the expert's voice, along with the communication of his affection and care through touch during the frustrating and gratifying moments of the subject's makeover journey. Also, the

rotating turns of the ‘mirror’ and the ‘couch’ that are present during the subject’s makeover process are indicative of the ongoing value of ‘self-reflection’ as well as the significance of arriving at one’s own interpretation and emotional understanding of the subjective self.

The pertinence of psychoanalytic approaches emerges clearly in this analysis and the usefulness of object relations psychoanalysis is highlighted. As Bainbridge (2012:85) writes ‘Th[e] notion of the object is an important one in the broader psychoanalytic context of the development of the sense of self and a capacity to forge creative relationships with both other people and the world in general’. The application of object relations psychoanalysis to the makeover discourse of *HTLGN* is greatly significant as it offers a deeper understanding of the importance of the emotional and mental development of relating and relatedness, the experience and discovery of the self both in relation to our lived experiences and psychological relationships. Ultimately, object relations psychoanalysis offers us an understanding of the internal world, thus enabling us to shape our sense of subjective self, and it therefore needs to be further integrated into the cultural frame. Such integration will provide us with psychoanalytic nuances in making sense of how emotional subjectivities are created, shaped, formed and often challenged within the cultural politics of mediated emotions.

## CHAPTER 6

### 10 Years On: The cultural significance of the Gok Wan phenomenon

Gok Wan's makeover situation has pushed the cultural boundaries of the traditional makeover format by facilitating an emotionally rich transformational experience where female participants can reflectively engage with hidden and often unexplored aspects of their inner subjective experiences. The therapeutic framework formulated by Gok Wan has generated a constructive postfeminist experience where ordinary female participants reflectively explore aspects of their feminine identity in a meaningful way that leads towards self-discovery. As an emblematic feature of the therapeutic discourse, *HTLGN* embraces the emotional messiness and ambivalence of current feminine experiences and opens up playful and creative spaces where emotional states in relation to the body (that are often led by frustration and disappointment) are learnt to be tolerated and used as a platform to gain an in-depth understanding of inner self-experiences. As the 'transformational agent' of the *HTLGN* experience, Gok Wan's 'good enough' motherly stance has appropriated a 'holding environment' where the makeover participants can safely voice and reflectively explore their inner 'naked' fears in a 'safe' space that allows them to engage with their emotional vulnerabilities and thus make sense of their troubled relationship with their bodies.

As my case study analysis of the makeover format's procedural process has revealed, *HTLGN* makes available a postfeminist opportunity for its subjects by generating a 'potential space' that encourages the renewal of definitions on what

constitutes a real ‘good enough’ body. This renewal holds an object relations psychoanalytic significance, as Winnicott’s ideas have shown, since it facilitates the emotional acceptance of the good and the messiness of subjectivity. It is this renewal that creates the facilitating possibility for the female participants to discover the hidden potential of their identity. Gok Wan’s *HTLGN* transformation process constitutes a therapeutic opportunity for its subjects to overcome their body related troubles by arriving at their own interpretation of the way in which they make sense of their body-related experiences.

A significant feature of the *HTLGN* experience, as discussed in Chapter 5, is that the makeover setting not only facilitates the emotional recognition and understanding of the subjects’ inner self experience but the reflective process of the makeover situation also has affective impact on Gok Wan himself. Gok Wan’s reflective and interactive involvement with his participants’ experiences of their body related struggles, signals the expert’s unresolved issues with body-dysmorphia, weight issues and his battle with an eating disorder. Gok Wan’s case reveals that the expert’s makeover ‘naked’ mirror sequence symbolically parallels his own former troubled encounter with mirror-object, where a symbolic absence was identified. While in the makeover setting Gok Wan’s motherly mirror-stance absorbs and/or makes sense of his subject’s overwhelming tearful reactions and expressions of emotional despair during their ‘naked’ encounter with the mirrors, his earlier experience indicates an absent maternal holding and mirroring experience which left him unable to recognise his self-worth and make sense of his emotional experience. The makeover ‘mirror’ situation serves a therapeutic

function for Gok Wan, since it offers an opportunity for the emotional restoration of his former ‘absence of mirroring’.

The *HTLGN* makeover situation and the effectiveness of its practice has launched Gok Wan as a powerful celebrity and dominant figure who has been recognised for his continued effort in raising emotional awareness for current feminine body related issues and concerns as well as for introducing ‘feel good’ practices that offer up opportunities for self-reflection and self-growth. The *HTLGN* procedural sequence and the symbolic use of the ‘mirror’ throughout the format have confirmed the efficacy of Gok Wan’s methods, since they have accentuated the usefulness of self-reflection as culturally therapeutic in offering opportunities for making sense of, discovering and identifying emotional troubles in relation to the body.

*HTLGN* has developed into a mediated space that has raised cultural and emotional awareness about dealing with, managing and making sense of current subjective body related struggles and anxieties experienced by ordinary women in various stages of womanhood. Gok Wan’s later media projects (during and after the production of *HTLGN*) have continued to inform his emotional work on issues around body-loathing and body-dysmorphia. The expert has continued to facilitate popular media spaces which raise emotional and cultural awareness in relation to the body and encourage body-acceptance through self-reflection practices.

In the following section, I will list, in chronological order, some of Gok Wan’s later media projects that took place during and after the production of *HTLGN* and

I analyse the *HTLGN* patterns, practices and purposes that Gok Wan has reflectively transferred through his media projects. Drawing on these media projects, I want to critically reflect on the cultural expansion of the Gok Wan phenomenon within contemporary media, which arises out of the therapeutic impact of the *HTLGN* experience. This is central to my thesis in understanding Gok Wan's development as a dominant and somewhat celebrated figure in the popular makeover landscape, whose name is now culturally associated with body-confidence, self-esteem and body awareness.

### **Gok Wan's media expansion**

During the production of *HTLGN*, in 2008, Gok Wan presented a reality 'beauty pageant' programme *Miss Naked Beauty* (Channel 4, 2008), where the focus was on celebrating the natural and diverse beauty in women, as opposed to the surgically 'enhanced' and idealistic concepts of body-image promoted by popular print media, celebrity culture and cosmetic makeover programmes. Following similar patterns to those in *HTLGN*, and adopting a similar postfeminist discursive tone, *Miss Naked Beauty* explored, in six episodes, issues and themes strongly related to and symptomatic of the concept of popular media beauty, such as body image, self-esteem, eating disorders and plastic surgery.

In 2009, Gok Wan began to move away from the confines of the makeover setting and presented the documentary *Gok Wan: Too Fat Too Young* (Channel 4, 2009). In this programme he converses with teenagers who have been affected by food addiction. He meets with consultants, where he discusses and discovers some of



the reasons behind the complex issues with food addiction. In a candid and personal journey, Gok Wan revisits his school in Leicester and his old family home to explore his early relationship with food and the factors that contributed to his obesity. During that journey, Gok Wan visits food addiction specialist Dr Robert Lefever, and in an emotionally overwhelming session the *HTLGN* expert unravels some of his former deep-rooted issues and troubles related to food and he reflects on his eating habits to make sense of his body related experiences. This aids the process of mirroring which this time is facilitated by a specialist in a 'transitional space'. This space enables him to gain emotional maturity and 'go-on-being', and he moves towards an integrated sense of self through the gradual establishment of a personal identity through the interpretation of self-experience and self-knowledge.

Drawing on his own reflective narratives, Gok Wan expresses his emotional troubles associated with food consumption and eating habits that have led to his weight struggles. He attempts to open up a space for dialogue and raise awareness on these issues, with the intention of helping British teenagers who are battling with obesity and food addiction. In 2012, he presented a programme called *Gok's Teens: The Naked Truth* (Channel 4, 2012), where he gave advice to teenagers about self-confidence, bullying, body anxieties and eating disorders. Influenced by his Channel 4 projects in *HTLGN* and *Gok's Teens: The Naked Truth*, Gok Wan launched a campaign to raise awareness on the importance of introducing a body-confidence class in British schools, as part of the Personal, Social and Health Education syllabus. Gok Wan revealed that his motivation behind this campaign also stemmed from his personal experience of the emotional complexities in

dealing with eating disorders and body dysmorphia. A BBC online article released by Del Crookes (2011) reported that 'Gok Wan's body image petition managed to get 50,000 signatures in 2009, with the [*HTLGN*] presenter personally delivering it to Number 10 Downing Street'. Gok Wan stated: 'I'm not saying that kids will turn around and stop having eating disorders. But just by opening up a dialogue and getting them to talk about it is ... important'. This signals Gok Wan's active involvement and cultural capacity to facilitate popular spaces for emotional work and raise political awareness on the complexities of body-image issues experienced not only by ordinary women but also by teenagers.

In 2012, Gok Wan presented a makeover series for singletons titled *Gok's Style Secrets* (Channel 4, 2012), where he borrowed procedural segments of his *HTLGN* self-reflective formula such as the mirror sequence, to coach his single female subjects to overcome their emotional troubles that have contributed to their body insecurities and therefore become more self-confident in dating and/or flirting with men. However, it is important to open up *Gok Wan's Style Secrets* to criticism by addressing a postfeminist problem since his project, in this instance, maintains the postfeminist ideals imposed by patriarchal societies and neoliberal discourses. In a makeover attempt to please and attract the male gaze, Gok Wan's project preserves the postfeminist view that women must subject themselves to constant beauty, style, self-grooming practices and that they must constantly work on their outer-appearance to find love. Moreover, it accentuates the postfeminist neoliberal discourses that personal unhappiness and not attaining love result from self-neglect and lack of personal responsibility. His project preserves the postfeminist *sensibility* that a woman's happiness and self-worth is validated by and reduced to

male admiration and the lack of a male gaze characterises the postfeminist woman as unsuccessful and deficient.

Further media projects that have contributed to the expansion of the *HTLGN* discursive framework and that have accentuated Gok Wan's media significance are the following: In 2007, Gok Wan published a book titled *How to Look Good Naked: Shop for Your Shape and Look Amazing!* In 2008 he circulated his *HTLGN* style and fashion manual *How to Dress: Your Complete Style Guide for Every Occasion*. Additional television projects of Gok Wan's are: *Gok's Fashion Fix* (Channel 4, 2008-2010); *Gok's Clothes Roadshow* (Channel 4, 2011); *Gok Wan: Made in China* (Channel 4, 2012); *Baggage* (Channel 4, 2012). In 2012, he presented his own cooking programme, *Gok Cooks Chinese* (Channel 4, 2012), where he often made reflective references back to his earlier relationship with food and weight and he later published his own Chinese cook-book, using the same title. In 2013 he published an additional Chinese recipe manual titled *Gok's Wok*.

In May 2014, Gok Wan's *HTLGN* approach to makeover culture stretched to US television, where he was invited to *The Today Show* (NBC, 1952-) to be part of its online campaign week to encourage positive body-image and self-esteem. NBC's *Today* launched a week-long series *Love your Selfie: Reclaiming Beauty*. Each day examined different topics revolving around society's obsession with body-image and offered constructive advice and on 'how to' think reflectively about the body and accept its imperfections. The inspirational week-long series created a cultural opportunity to reclaim 'real' beauty by transforming the traditional definitions of

beauty image promoted by print media, fashion and celebrity culture into a positive attempt to encourage viewers to be comfortable in their own skin.

The topics covered during *Love Your Selfie: Reclaiming Beauty* week included: ‘Mirror, Mirror - We have the power to change the way we view ourselves when we look in the mirror’; ‘Beauty Comes in All Shapes and Sizes - Are we open to seeing "real" bodies and natural shapes in fashion and the media?’; ‘Teens Tackle Body Image - Teens discuss what it means to “Love Your Selfie.”’; ‘Learn to Love Yourself Naked - Can we be comfortable in our skin?’; ‘Body After Baby’ (TV News Desk, 2014).

Recognised by the *Today Show* as the fashion consultant of the *HTLGN* makeover practice, Gok Wan was invited to be part of the week-long series *Love Your Selfie: Reclaiming Beauty* by hosting the online episode titled *Learn to Love Yourself Naked - Can we be comfortable in our skin* so as to offer his advice and lessons on the importance of self-reflection, body acceptance and body awareness. On the show’s online website, they comment that: ‘In the world according to Gok, it’s a multi-step process: Looking, learning and loving by embracing the body you’ve got, imperfections and all’ (Today, 2014). For this online episode Gok Wan restages the *HTLGN* procedural formula and opens up the space to an American subject, who in the ‘mirror sequence’ reflects on how the birth of her children led her to lose her body confidence. Negotiating maternal ambivalence has been an important hallmark in the development of *HTLGN* as a culturally constructive postfeminist discourse, as Chapter 3 outlined.

The *HTLGN* expert's involvement in presenting his knowledge on 'how to' *Learn to Love Yourself Naked* signals the extension and expansion of the Gok Wan phenomenon and the affective impact of his practices in raising cultural awareness of current body related concerns. Furthermore, it is important to remark that the first episode, 'Mirror, Mirror' invited the hosts of the *Today Show* to stand in front of the mirror and reflect on their body-image, signalling the cultural phenomenon and impact of Gok Wan in opening up and creating the popular media space for the host(s) to talk about their body-image issues and concerns.

Shortly after his US appearance, in September 2014, Gok Wan received an honorary doctorate from Birmingham City University alongside fashion students; as a recognition of his work since the launch of *HTLGN* and aside from his media projects, Gok Wan has been involved in various charitable projects, supporting anti-bullying charities Kidscape and Ditch the Label and in 2015 became an ambassador for The Prince's Trust.

Gok Wan's media projects signal the expansion of his work in continuing to generate cultural consciousness of often unspoken problems and themes around body-dysmorphia, eating disorders, bullying and weight troubles in British teens and adults. Moreover, his media expansion has increased recognition and has established him as the 'charismatic' know-how figure whose advice promises happiness and a 'feel good' experience about oneself. Gok Wan's cultural recognition and the preservation of his *HTLGN* reputation has generated fame and

a profitable income for the expert, all of which feed into the neoliberal form of discursive power.

Gok Wan's cultural contributions in raising social and emotional awareness in relation to body issues and eating disorders add value to his media significance and accentuate his cultural authority within the popular media frame. Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' provides a useful tool in understanding the *HTLGN* expert's cultural authority as well as the economic potential of the Gok Wan phenomenon.

In the neoliberal framework, cultural knowledge can pay off. The acquisition of particular skills, practices and knowledge signals, are understood in Bourdieu's (1984) terms as the accumulation of 'cultural capital'. Bourdieu's work on cultural capital allows for an understanding of the way in which knowledge and skills can be transferable, creating 'commercial potential and the way to which ... [a] television expert [develops into] ... a significant figure of cultural production' (Phillips, 2005:227). Bourdieu (1984:467) suggests that 'all knowledge of the social world is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression'. Gok Wan's *HTLGN* project, along with his supplementary media developments, confirms the cultural expansion of his superior knowledge on 'emotional knowingness', and thus legitimates certain forms of cultural capital above others and confirms his power and authority. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) ideas, it is the possession of this form of capital that determines Gok Wan's dominant position in the popular media landscape and British makeover culture.

Gok Wan's extended media projects on the concept of self-improvement through body-awareness and body-acceptance by the mobilisation of emotional and therapeutic discourses contributes to the large amount of the media-related capital that he has acquired, which in turn validates his right to fame. However, Gok Wan's media work on the promotion of self-esteem and body-confidence through *Reclaiming Real Beauty* raises a postfeminist problem, where the expert is seen to capitalise on feminine insecurities about the gendered body in order to promote and establish his 'charismatic' figure as a brand who expands on the free-market ethos of neoliberal politics. To reclaim 'real' beauty now becomes a form of postfeminist empowerment, where 'emotional correctness' is now achieved through 'quick fix' practices that free the mind from body insecurities. But how does this clash with Gok Wan's *HTLGN* 'therapeutic ethos' and what does it suggest about the trappings of fame and celebrity in the neoliberal context?

It can be argued that Gok Wan's know-how approach on body-issues, self-esteem and body-awareness is a 'by-product of [his] own cultural production' (Bourdieu, 1984:24), which has been developed through his *HTLGN* practice and expanded through his ongoing 'emotional' labour within media. Drawing on Weber's work, it can be argued that, in Gok Wan's case, the acquirement of his cultural capital 'functions as a necessary survival skill'. As Weber comments:

[S]tyle gurus often occupy discredited social location marked by sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and perhaps even economic status. Cultural capital, [in the case of style experts] functions as a necessary survival skill rather than privilege of the classes. Unlike the elite for whom the ways of cultural capital are naturalised, these experts who, have had to learn their know-how, which is precisely why they possess the self-

awareness to transmit such knowledge to subjects. (Weber, 2009:139-40)

Gok Wan's continuing cultural development and expansion of his knowledge on body-issues signal the affective and dominant impact of his self-improvement knowledge and approach. Gok Wan upholds his cultural relevance where his methods continue to appropriate a culturally therapeutic discourse that facilitates opportunities for greater expressivity, increased affectivity, recognition of subjective states and management of emotions within popular mediated spaces.

Here, Richards and Brown's (2002) notion of the 'therapeutic culture hypothesis' is instructive, as it provides us with a cultural understanding behind Gok Wan's *HTLGN* approach and 'therapeutically driven' principles that have led to the media expansion of his self-reflective methods within the popular media landscape:

People who carry the stamp of this culture most clearly, whom we might call therapeutic individuals (whether they are therapist, patients or neither), want to make something better. They do so typically not in a spirit of adolescent idealism or millenarianism, of wanting to make the world better, but in a more pragmatic and focused way. They want to ease a pain or improve the quality of their own or others' emotional lives by exploring and managing feelings, by responding to distress and attempting to repair damage. (Richards and Brown, 2002: 112-113)

By psycho-culturally recognising Gok Wan as a 'therapeutic individual', it can be argued that *HTLGN* and his later media projects create 'holding' spaces where he continues to work through his former body related troubles. In his continued effort to enhance his inner emotional awareness and to come to terms with his former subjective experiences with eating disorders, bullying, body dysmorphia and



weight struggles, Gok Wan ‘want[s] to ease the pain’ by culturally acknowledging his feelingful states and emotional struggles. He offers up ‘potential space’ where a therapeutic form of ‘cultural experience’ can be facilitated in popular media spaces in an attempt to culturally renew and restore object relations that have been emotionally disrupted and are in crisis.

Having outlined Gok Wan’s media projects during and after the completion of *HTLGN*, in this chapter I aim to analyse the extent of Gok Wan’s influence outside the boundaries of *HTLGN*. To do that, I will discuss his involvement in an advertisement campaign. Here, Gok Wan becomes the ambassador and spokesperson of the Danone *Activia* ‘feeling good from within’ movement to promote the health benefits of *Activia*’s pro-biotic yogurt to British female consumers. His involvement in the *Activia* movement is a sound example of the development of the Gok Wan brand and the cultural expansion of the Gok Wan phenomenon. The focus of this analysis is the extent of Gok Wan’s phenomenon and signals the therapeutic properties of his cultural authority. It sets a cultural reminder of the affective impact of his *HTLGN* skills, knowledge and practices, and how they dwell symbolically in the contemporary media landscape.

### **‘Feeling Good from Within’ with Gok Wan**

In 2013, the *Activia* marketing campaign launched a series of advertisements starring Gok Wan, which borrowed visual and symbolic connotations established in *HTLGN*’s makeover platform. In the advertisement campaign, Gok Wan is endorsing the ‘feel-good’ benefits of a pro-biotic yogurt that improve women’s

digestive systems. In the *Activia* campaign, food and digestive problems are highly gendered and thus raise a postfeminist problem. Studies conducted in modern western societies report consistent associations between gender and specific foods, and yogurt is often considered a feminine comestible (Kiefer et al. 2005; Jensen & Holm, 1999). Healthy eating, as promoted by Activia, improves the function of the female body and regulates its digestive system by reducing bloating and controlling irregular bowel movements, thus making the digestive problem gendered. Unlike men, postfeminist women are expected to consume healthy pro-biotic products to improve and exercise control over their bodily functions, which should always remain private and secret. Any bowel function becomes a source for shame, embarrassment and emotional distress for women. In addition, bloating as a physical condition shows swelling in the abdominal area that creates the appearance of fatness. As Chapter 3 has outlined, for the postfeminist woman the appearance of fatness characterises the body a 'bad' object, since it conflicts with the concept of thinness promoted by postfeminist media which defines the 'ideal/good' postfeminist body.

The marketing of the *Activia* yogurt campaign starring Gok Wan exhorts British female consumers to attain a perfectly flat abdomen through the consumption of a healthy (dietary) product, a subtext for weight-loss as it promotes the attainment of idealised female body standards. Healthy eating develops into a postfeminist responsibility and demands neoliberal 'self-governance' practices in order to exercise control over the body. At the same time, it engages female citizenship and empowerment through consumption. Gok Wan's involvement in the *Activia*

campaign conflicts with the expert's position, firmly established in *HTLGN*, that he does not support weight regimes as part of his self-improvement method.

The involvement of Gok Wan as a spokesperson for the 'feeling good from within' pledge marketed by *Activia* adds a promotional value to the discourse of healthiness, as it suggests the product is a pathway to emotional well-being, vitality and an active life, and therefore to an improved better self, indicative of the *HTLGN* discourse. The concept of 'feel good' becomes personal responsibility and guides the postfeminist woman to 'practice psychological self-improvement and physical subjectification as means of liberation from the dominant ideology of beauty' (Murray, 2012:13). It can be argued that the cultural collaboration between Gok Wan's psychology of 'feeling good' about oneself and *Activia*'s physiology of 'feeling good from within' movement signals a symbolic equation.

*Activia*'s physiological experience of 'feeling good' is suggestive of the yogurt's pro-biotic effect on the body through improved function of the body's digestive system. Gok Wan's psychological inner experience of 'feeling good' about oneself is connotative of the *HTLGN* approach and self-reflection practices, where emotional exploration of body related concerns leads to body-awareness, emotional well-being and an improved relationship with the body.

Furthermore, the turn of phrase 'starts from within' is symptomatic of the same symbolic equation, since the term 'within' is psychoanalytically suggestive of an object's inner world and indicative of the internal physiological function of the

body. Therefore, the ideas of physical and psychological well-being are condensed in the advertisement's text and paste over the complex nature of the inner world.

Drawing on that symbolic equation, it can be argued that Gok Wan's involvement in the advertisement campaign to promote 'feel good' eating practices is a lifestyle branding attempt by the *HTLGN* expert to fit in with the new neoliberal discourses of 'healthiness'. Gok Wan involvement as a spokesperson for *Activia* can be critically read as a neoliberal tactic in capitalising upon and selling goods related to health in order to commercialise 'well-being' and commodify his cultural recognition and advice into a brand. Gok Wan's cultural authority, as the face of *Activia*, taps into the *zeitgeist* in the context of therapy culture. His knowledge and advice on self-esteem and 'feel good' practices develop into a market-based vehicle, that promote emotionalised forms of 'self-governance' through consumption. Gok Wan's *Activia* involvement destabilises his caring and empathetic position that he emotionally facilitated in the *HTLGN* framework.

*Activia*'s commercial reconstruction of the makeover setting and incorporation of the lifestyle branded advice of Gok Wan to promote a postfeminist product that promises happiness and feel good experience through the body reentrenches my argument on the neoliberal imperatives of makeover shows, where the promise of becoming a better self involves the reworking of the inner (psychology) and outer (physiology) relationship, the mobilisation of maintaining or attaining thinness which is achieved through a reflexive, lifestyle-oriented mode of consumer-citizenship.

To activate the ‘feeling good from within’ commercial campaign, the *Activia* advertisements (re)produce the *HTLGN* experience by borrowing the *mise-en-scène* of Gok Wan’s makeover procedural methods. These are loaded with reflective narratives, emotional investments and unconscious processes that were established and activated by Gok Wan through his reflective practices with his makeover participants. However, the reconstruction of *HTLGN* in the *Activia* campaign, with Gok Wan appropriating the space, raises the critical question on whether his ‘feel good from within’ involvement in the marketing campaign constitutes a form of ‘selling-out’ and capitalising upon *HTLGN*’s cultural value. This form of ‘selling out’ of the *HTLGN* project is evident in the marketing campaign, because the reconstruction of its methods are not formed to activate ‘cultural experience’ nor to facilitate emotional work towards body-awareness. It is an attempt on the part of the ‘charismatic’ expert to increase the commercial value of his brand and media-capital.

This critical discussion brings us back to the issues raised by Furedi on the notion of therapy culture and the neoliberal production of the fragile and vulnerable self that is in constant need of self-management, exercise and a self-centred quest for self-fulfilment, happiness and emotional well-being. Extending Furedi’s viewpoint, it can be argued that the *Activia* ‘feel good from within’ movement constitutes another form of promoting the neoliberal consumption of products related to therapy practices in order to foster the inner and outer emotional and physiological well-being. The consumption of such therapy-based products fuels the notion that the good citizen is self-aware, self-caring and a successful consumer

capitalist and preserves the view of the self as ‘emotionally deficient’ and in need of ‘emotional correctness’.

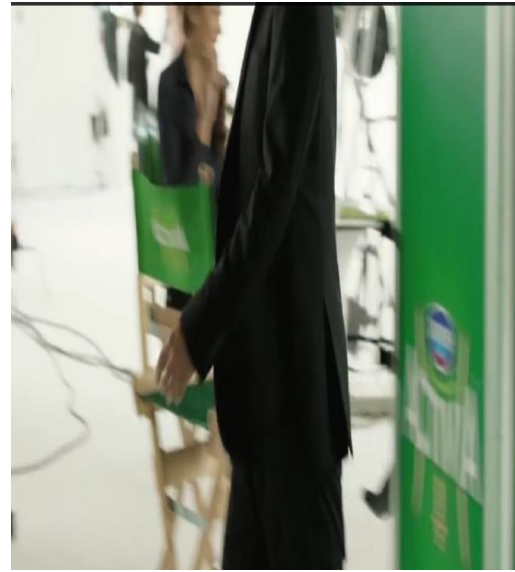
However, in this chapter I put forward a psychoanalytic reflective analysis of the importance of the advertisements in extending Gok Wan’s influence beyond *HTLGN*, in order to underpin his cultural value and significance nearly ten years since the 2006 launch of his innovative makeover series. To do this, I will overlay a psychoanalytic reading of the advertisements to point out how the format and textual aspects have been assembled in a way that renews the *HTLGN* makeover format, suggesting its significance as an abiding cultural experience. Additionally, I will identify and explain key elements and signs of the *HTLGN* experience that transpire through the advertisements. I will examine how these now reside as popular cultural symbols that are loaded with emotional awareness around body-confidence and well-being, with Gok Wan now established as a contemporary internalised cultural object that activates and appropriates their therapeutic significance. The *Activia* campaign advertisements starring Gok Wan provide a helpful constellation of all these factors, thus allowing me to articulate the extent of the influence of both the expert and the show in the contemporary British media setting. The following section will now analyse the advertisements themselves.

### ***Activia’s re-staging of the How To Look Good Naked setting***

*Activia*’s opening of the ‘feel good from within’ campaign aired on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. The advertisement takes place in a white studio set aiming to replicate the most identifiable moments and stages of *HTLGN*’s textual format.



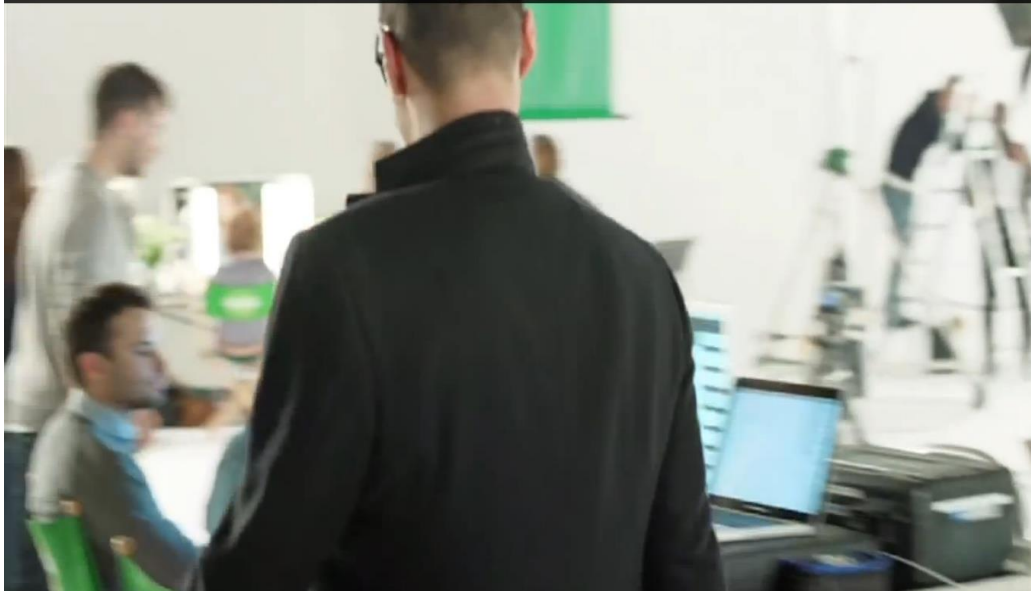
*Figure 53: Activia's screen*



*Figure 54: Activia's 'mystery' man*

In the initial shots of the commercial, as Figures 53 and 54 illustrate, the *Activia* logo is showcased on a portable dressing screen informing the viewers of the advertised product. In Figure 54, a man dressed in black makes an appearance from behind the screen (he is later revealed as Gok Wan). The screen here could be read as a symbolic indicator of *HTLGN*, since it reminds us of the act of changing clothes and the idea of nakedness. This reading is further supported by the fact that a portable screen was always in the backdrop of the *HTLGN* setting. For instance, in Leanne's case, a portable screen is visible when Gok Wan cuts her tights (Figure 25), as well as at makeover stage when Leanne has changed into wearing her new support pants (Figure 27) and when Gok Wan is about to remodify her pink robe into a dress (Figure 29). Also, a portable screen is included in Nikki's shop window challenge assembly, where it is used as a surface to hang the 'naked' dresses (Figure 32). Returning to the advertisement, it is worth commenting that the camera has not yet captured or confirmed the identity of the 'mystery' man –

however his formal attire (black suit) is connotative of a know-how ‘professional’ and/or an expert (Figure 55).



*Figure 55: Activia’s scientific lab and Gok Wan as the professional figure*

The blurry backdrop gives the impression of a scientific lab and a ‘work in progress’ that is run by a professional. This scientific reading subliminally points to popular media reviews that critically praised Gok Wan’s *HTLGN* method through statements such as, ‘Gok is the undisputed king of TV style [and] should be made available to all women on the NHS’ because ‘when it comes to making women feel good about themselves, Gok Wan is a genius’ (Harper Collins, 2009). Such reviews suggest a popular embracing of Gok Wan’s charismatic approach in teaching popular British women ‘how to’ feel good and attain body confidence, thus accentuating the public perception that his work benefits mental health practices. The latter symbolically qualifies Gok Wan as an ‘expert’, so his popular media persona evolves from a fashion stylist to a ‘feeling good’ consultant. Most importantly, this scientific setting mobilises the ‘feel good’ benefits associated



with Gok Wan, in order to heighten claims to truth and healthy living, and the appearance of Gok Wan confirms the associations with *HTLGN*. The latter is symbolically manifested through the use of the blurry backdrop that signifies a scientific lab, where Gok Wan is occupying the role of a qualified ‘mental health’ consultant. This makes his ‘charismatic’ public persona accord with the realms of therapy culture in ways that are timely and significant. Furthermore, the appearance of Gok Wan mobilises the first layer of the *HTLGN* makeover signification in the advertisement context, since his presence activates a ‘cultural experience’ that the series has established.

As this chapter will now show, the *Activia* campaign makes extensive use of the discursive structure of *HTLGN*. *Activia* uses key procedural moments of communication and facets of the *HTLGN* experience, which all collectively produce a cultural re-creation of the ‘naked’ experience and the therapeutic opportunity. It is this therapeutic emphasis that adds value to the *Activia* brand, hence *Activia*’s desire to make use of the *HTLGN* discourse in general and Gok Wan in particular.

The initial symbolic reference to the makeover experience, as depicted in the textual format of the commercial, introduces the relationship of trust that is established initially between Gok Wan and his female subjects when invited into the makeover space.

**Gok Wan: Hey Gorgeous ...**



*Figure 56: Gok Wan greets one of the Activia's supporter's with a kiss*

The kiss on the cheek (Figure 56) is often his initial standard greeting with his female subjects, as we have seen, and this is an attempt to show his care, familiarity and non-threatening nature. Gok Wan's friendly expression of care is repeatedly documented throughout the *HTLGN* makeover series and in his later projects. The combination of his friendly non-verbal greeting of a smile and a kiss with the turn of phrase 'Hey gorgeous', activates the first cultural reference of the *HTLGN* experience but it also accentuates the public and popular image perception that, for Gok Wan, '... you are gorgeous to start with ...' (Wignall, 2008).

The following screenshot (Figure 57) invites us to recall the reading of the first procedural moment of the *HTLGN* process and depicts its symbolic reconstruction:

**Gok Wan:** Right, I am going to let you lot into a little secret.

If you really want to feel good, then you have got to start from the inside.



*Figure 57: Gok Wan staging the HTLGN  
'mirror sequence'*



*Figure 58: A subject's  
mirror reflection*

Gok Wan's initial statement emphasises the most important quality established by the makeover experiences of *HTLGN*: the importance of self-reflection as an approach that allows one to face one's 'naked' fears and understand one's emotions. The commercial reconstruction seen in Figure 57 can be read as a condensation of the 'mirror' sequence of the makeover method used on the show and is reproduced through its symbolic restaging.

It is my view that the mirror as an object holds a symbolic function and generates an object relations psychoanalytic point of reference here, since an affective 'use of [the mirror] object' is activated through the immediate presence and empathetic stance of Gok Wan. As Figure 57 illustrates, a female subject is positioned in front of the full-length mirror and she contemplates her outfit and body image reflection.

As discussed in Chapter 5, this affective ‘use of the mirror’ is activated through Gok Wan, who is positioned standing behind the woman. With his hand placed on her shoulder, he signals the expert’s ‘holding’ function during the process in a makeover attempt to ‘mirror’ back the emotional states that emerge during the subject’s self-reflective account and thus makes available new meanings for her to take on and make sense of.

A symbolic subtext of this screenshot is the way in which the woman examines her clothed appearance, which is reminiscent of the way that the mirror has been used in former makeover formats. For instance, in the *WNTW* setting, the mirror(s) has been used by makeover experts (Trinny and Susannah) to insult the participant’s clothes and humiliate their outer appearance. As a result, the mirror’s affective use has been denied. Consequently, the notion of ‘feel[ing] good ... start[ing] from the inside’ in the advertisement is a reminder of *HTLGN*’s innovative approach, which centres on the more meaningful and affective use of the mirror. This involves looking at one’s body in the mirror with clothes on and off; emotionally exploring one’s body-image reflection and talking about what one feels and sees; facing one’s body fears and/or dissatisfactions. The latter is also evocative of Gok Wan’s later projects post-*HTLGN*, which involved raising awareness of issues around body confidence, self-esteem, body-dysmorphia and eating disorders.

As my case study analysis has revealed, *Activia*’s visual (re)staging of the ‘mirror’ sequence is loaded with object relating significance and Gok Wan’s somewhat motherly presence is symptomatic of the ‘holding environment’ and ‘affective’ mirroring experiences that he makes available for his female subject. These object

relating characteristics for Winnicott are essential to what constitutes a ‘good mothering’ approach as Chapters 4 and 5 revealed. As we have seen, Gok Wan employs this motherly quality in order to contain his subjects during their overwhelming makeover moments. In addition, and as we have also seen, the ‘mirror’ psychoanalytically operates as a ‘therapeutic’ prompt that signals the ‘reflective’ engagement between Gok Wan and the makeover subject in *HTLGN*. This provides ‘a sounding board’ where current embodied postfeminist experiences are articulated, voiced and reflected upon.

The use of the mirror in the advertisement’s setting ‘reflects’ an additional makeover moment, which in my view is suggestive of the creative and playful aspects of the *HTLGN* procedure. The magnified shot (Figure 58) emphasises the mirrored woman who holds tightly a garment by its hanger. Such a depiction reminds us of *HTLGN*’s symbolic use of clothes as ‘transitional objects’, where their handling and texture evoke for the female subject an object relating purpose, one that Gok Wan activates, re-contextualises and transforms in the makeover context and which leads towards the makeover subject’s self-discovery and self-understanding. In particular, the mirror in the advertisement acts as a symbolic reproduction of the particular makeover challenge that I identified in Nikki’s case study (Chapter 5), where she is invited to complete a ‘naked’ challenge in a publicly staged shop window. In this example, Gok Wan offers Nikki a ‘dress on a hanger’ to hold onto, which, in the potential space that the ‘good-enough’ Gok-mother activates, operates as a ‘transitional object’. The use of the hanging garment functions not only as a comfort object for Nikki to soothe her anxiety over the ‘naked’ task she undertakes, but it also allows her to move towards an autonomous

sense of self in Gok's absence, which in turn facilitates the subject's 'reflective creativity' and self-discovery. All these aspects of the advertisement remind the viewer of the rationale of the *HTLGN* experience and the role of Gok Wan as a guiding coach, as well as of the maternal care that enables women to achieve stronger body confidence, self-awareness and a greater sense of well-being. The following screenshots replicate an additional *HTLGN* reflective staging, one where the makeover situation captures the emotional transformation of the female subject: the 'naked' photo-shoot or a therapeutic photo challenge, as I identified.



*Figure 59: Gok Wan assisting the women on their HTLGN photoshoot*



*Figure 60: Gok Wan enters the frame as ‘One of the Girls’*

As I identified in Chapter 5, the purpose of the makeover photo therapeutic challenge is to capture the subjects’ new-found body confidence and emotionally reflect on what they have attained during their emotional participation in the *HTLGN* self-reflective exercises. As the commercial shot illustrates (Figure 59), these five women act as a symbolic representation of the *HTLGN* community that Gok Wan has shaped. His *HTLGN* approach created a space where ordinary postfeminist women could to speak of the ‘problem’ that had no name, since the issues that were expressed and talked about had often previously remained silent, considered unimportant and/or culturally unacknowledged.

Once Gok captures their performance of body confidence through the photographic lens, he then enters into the picture frame (Figure 60) and positions himself as ‘One of the Girls’ which connotes an important part of his role and his approach towards his female subjects. The symbolic depiction of his

stereotypically female friendly approach underscores his non-judgmental approach towards his makeover subjects that strongly differentiates him from the ‘bitchy’ attitude of his former makeover competitors of *WNTW*. As I noted in the previous chapter, Gok Wan is an interesting figure in this regard because his ‘*suspended*’ [homo] sexuality not only allows him the physical proximity with his female subjects, but also deflates any turn of aggression, attack or bitchiness that he might express in his humorous exchanges with them through his expression of camp, which constitutes a part of his ‘gay sensibility’ (Babuscio, 1993:20). As Alessandra Lemma notes:

Humorous exchanges are a means through which people can jointly engage in a creative art, it feels very exciting and certainly pleasurable to exchange a dialogue that is funny and most importantly it can also help us to overcome impasses in relationships. Every relationship has to weather the inevitable ebb and flow of both love and aggression. (Lemma, 2000:19)

These potential conflicts are expressed by Gok Wan concerning the subjects’ choice of fashion or their stylistic arrangements, and are deflated at the same time through his camp use of humorous exchange as well through his affectionate tactility. These contribute to his image projection, allowing him, in a sense, to become the m/other. What is also noteworthy is the view of Gok Wan engaging in a particular kind of relating, from where he projects his own feelings about women through the very literal behaviours he deploys as strategies for coping with the deconstruction and critique of the body. The moment and the humour surrounding it seems to mock this invasion of space and allows Gok Wan to reduce the subject’s feeling any possible negative tension and anxiety in relation to body. Therefore, the entrance of Gok Wan into the makeover frame of experience also captures his



mark of being the creator and the facilitator of the *HTLGN* ‘know-how’ approach towards body-confidence, thus proving his authenticity and ‘charismatic’ qualities, all of which are being projected and captured in the picture frame.

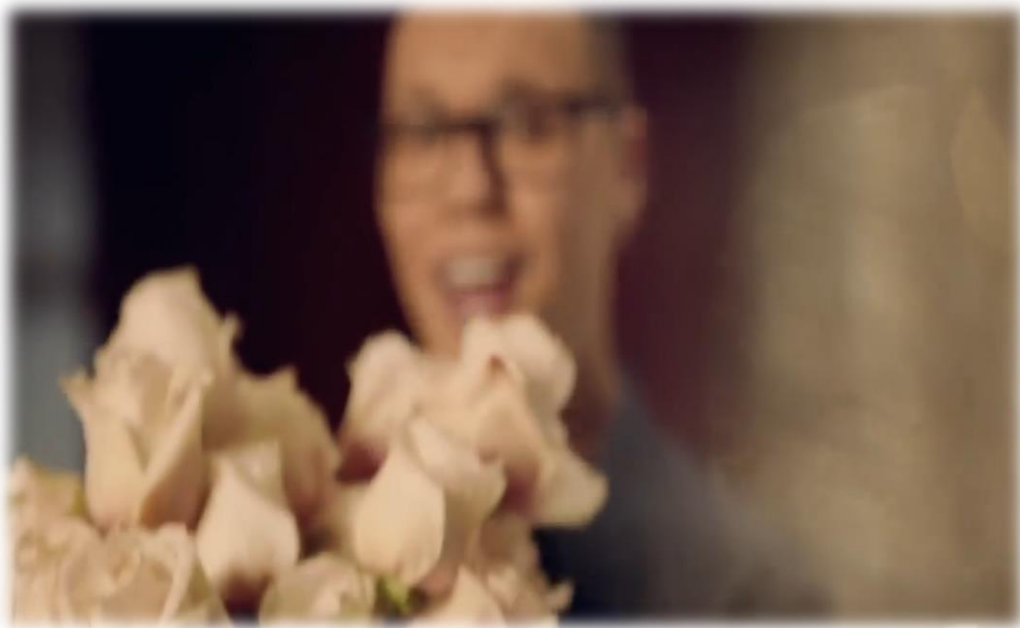
The first *Activia* advertisement lays the foundation for the notion of the makeover space in this campaign. The *HTLGN* discourse has been generated through its main procedural stages and now forms an important part of the ‘holding’ postfeminist experience that Gok Wan has generated. Moreover, the reproduction of these key *HTLGN* moments in the *Activia* commercial in some respect validates what my textual analysis has discovered as to where the object relating and therapeutic importance of the *HTLGN* experience is located. This is in the participant’s interaction with Gok Wan in the mirror sequence as well as in the ‘naked’ self-reflective challenges. These procedures are specific to the discursive makeover formation of *HTLGN* and are indicative of Gok Wan’s influence in shaping its composition. In the *Activia* campaign, we see how these procedures are mobilised, lending weight to the influence of Gok Wan and his techniques in the postfeminist setting.

Once the makeover setting is furnished with its props, the next *Activia* sequence draws on connotations of inner space as deployed in the *HTLGN* discourse. This situation moves away from the procedural staging of the makeover setting and taps into its therapeutic essentials and discourses. The notion of the ‘therapeutic’ is activated ‘on the couch’ and is arguably suggestive of the therapeutic evolution of the makeover format and cultural postfeminist contribution of the expert through his capacity to offer a constructive postfeminist opportunity, which facilitates

emotional awareness on current issues and themes on feminine subjective experiences in relation to the body. Arguably, this invites a psychoanalytic reading, as I will show.

### ***Activia's condensation of Gok Wan's 'therapeutic' practice***

The second commercial advertisement aired on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The opening shot of the advertisement begins with an intentionally blurry snap shot of Gok Wan decorating a living room by positioning a vase of flowers on a side table (Figure 61).



*Figure 61: A blurry depiction of Gok Wan in a livingroom*

The blurriness of the screen is suggestive of an 'intermediate space' that exists in the realm of fantasy and reality. It is almost as though an illusory element is being activated through the suggestiveness of a state of a reverie. Here, the notion of reverie holds a psychoanalytic importance. 'Reverie, like manifest content of

dreams, is an aspect of conscious experience that is intimately connected with unconscious experience. One must struggle to “hold on to” one’s reverie experience before it is “re-claimed” by the unconscious’ (Ogden, 1997: 721). What is interesting here is the fact that reverie is a process in which metaphors are created because unconscious experience can only be ‘seen’ or reflected upon when represented to oneself metaphorically (Arlow, 1979; Edelson, 1983; Edelson, 1972; Shengold, 1981). In the psychoanalytic setting:

Reverie is a principal form of re-presentation of the unconscious (largely intersubjective) experience of analyst and analysand. The analytic use of reverie is the process by which unconscious experience is made into verbally symbolic metaphors that re-present unconscious aspects of ourselves to ourselves. (Ogden, 1997:727)

The metaphors that are generated as a result of the ‘unconscious’ state of reverie are strongly interconnected with the development and creation of the ‘potential space’ of the *HTLGN* experience where Gok Wan activates the emotional process of self-reflection. In the advertisement under discussion here, the state of reverie is sustained throughout and is connoted by the use of the visual blurriness.

In the images below (Figures 62 and 63) Gok Wan is depicted walking around the living room with great ease, making a statement: ‘You know what? We do not treat ourselves enough!’ At the same time, he adds stylistic/decorative touches around the room, peppering it up as though setting up the makeover backdrop for an emotional transformation that will be activated once the female subject enters into that symbolically replicated *HTLGN* facilitating space. As depicted in the screen shots below, Gok Wan goes on to adjust/reduce the brightness of the room (Figure

63) and lights candles on the living room table (Figure 63) in order to create a more tranquil atmosphere in an attempt to communicate and connote a calming and soothing experience.



*Figure 62: Gok Wan is adjusting the lights      Figure 63: Gok Wan lights  
the candles*

The indulgent staging of the room through its lighting and the candles are commonly associated with ‘pampering’ culture’, a self-care neoliberal practice of beautification associated with the concept of ‘postfeminist sensibility’ and individualism. These sequences amount to an endorsement of such practices by Gok Wan. He thus becomes closely associated with the postfeminist discourse here. Moreover, the flowers, the atmospheric lights and candles stereotypically code the space as feminine and private. The living room setting connotes luxury, which is perhaps suggestive of a particular transformation of the domestic private space within the context of makeover television. This transformation is related to

the women's lives and the inner perception echoing the focus of the *HTLGN* discourse. In this way, however, the commercial also visually projects a condensation of emotions and psychological well-being. The concept of therapy is overlaid here through symbols and metaphors and is introduced initially through the image of Gok Wan lighting the candles. The ritual of lighting the candles translates into the popular lifestyle practice of aromatherapy and has the connotation of various world religions, indicating the importance of such practices in the age of postfeminism. Aromatherapy is an alternative practice that involves altering one's mood, cognitive, psychological or physical wellbeing through the use of oils and scents. What becomes apparent through this symbolic depiction of aromatherapy is Gok Wan's method of approach in altering his makeover subject's body image misconception. As my case analysis of the makeover method has revealed, Gok Wan is using self-esteem building exercises and self-reflective (postfeminist) practices to alter his subjects' 'distorted' body-image perception and behaviours, which in turn emotionally disrupt and disturb how they emotionally relate to their body. All these decorative modes of signification set the backdrop for the connotative theme of *HTLGN* that resonates behind Gok Wan's presence in the scenes of this *Activia* advertisement. As I noted earlier, this scene is activated through the entrance of a female figure into the 'therapeutic'/reflective living space where Gok Wan is awaiting her (Figure 64).

Gok Wan welcomes the female subject stating: *You deserve a little more 'me' time!* His commercial narrative is a reminder of the cultural period in which *HTLGN* is located. As discussed in Chapter 2, the work of Furedi (2004) critically reminds us that the notion of 'therapy culture' in the western world has led to the creation

of narcissistic personalities that are constantly and emotionally self-preoccupied and this reduces social problems around subjectivity, politics and identity to emotional deficiency and personal unhappiness. In addition, the luxury spaces, the self-beautification practices and the creation of a ‘tranquil’ space along with aromatherapy and, most importantly, the *Activia* product endorsed by the charismatic figure of Gok Wan connote the capitalistic promotion of ‘quick fix’ and ‘feel good’ practices to enhance emotional and psychological well-being, all of which belong to what Yates (2011) coins as products of a ‘charismatic therapy’. However, what is pertinent in this advertisement is how the therapeutic and cultural experience of *HTLGN* is replicated in the setting and how it establishes Gok Wan’s charismatic persona as the culturally internalised image of a good therapist. The psychoanalytic exploration of the *HTLGN* ‘therapeutic’ discourse overlaid in the setting will be thoroughly discussed in the following section.



*Figure 64: Gok Wan welcomes and invites a female subject to sit ‘on the couch’*

As figure 64 illustrates, the woman enters into the living space and Gok Wan, who stands behind the ‘couch’, symbolically replicates the welcoming process of the *HTLGN* experience. Therefore, the room now becomes Gok’s (media) practice space, which connotes the ‘holding space’ of the makeover situation. This symbolic depiction of the room parallels that of the therapeutic setting and it becomes the physical ‘holding environment’ where the therapist conveys to the patient that s/he is safe to explore those areas of self-experiences that are felt to be threatening and loaded with emotional despair.

As explored in the preceding chapters, Gok Wan’s presence activates a safe ‘holding space’ for his subjects when engaging in the reflective tasks of the makeover procedure, a space where the good-enough Gok-mother comforts his subjects, thus making them feel understood as they reflect on their emotions and body related anxieties.

Here Gok Wan projects a motherly object, a sense of identity that he has developed and stabilised during the makeover discourse of *HTLGN*. The concept of the motherly internal figure is at play and is connoted through the representation of the ‘home’ setting in which the commercial takes place. In addition, the concept of ‘home’ is strongly associated with the maternal as well as with the space where the internal object is located. The notion of the maternal figure is symbolically depicted in the presence of Gok Wan, who repeatedly labels his identity within the makeover discourse as the Fairy Gok-mother, a reference to the classic story of *Cinderella* and the important magical role of her Fairy Godmother. The symbolic depiction of the Fairy ‘Gok-mother’ accentuates his role as a ‘transformational

agent' operating without judgement or envy towards his contemporary *Cinderella* subjects, who lack self-confidence and self-belief. He opens up a 'holding' space for emotional transformation where current themes and internal processes of the postfeminist experience can be explored and culturally and emotionally understood. In addition, Gok Wan symbolically functions as a postfeminist cultural symbol, who holds magic powers and 'transforms' his subjects' negative experiences into learning ones that facilitate self-growth and emotional awareness.

The depiction of the woman entering the room, and the availability of Gok Wan behind the couch, resonates with my psychoanalytic reading of the makeover space that sees the entrance into the *HTLGN* setting for the first time as entering into a stereotypical look-alike 'consulting' space with certain therapeutic potential. Gok Wan's place in the room signifies it as a space in which postfeminist 'cultural experiences' are located, with the 'couch' being the 'object' that activates the concept of 'self-reflective' practices and therapy in which our culture is now so actively engaged.

As my reading of the commercial suggests, the notion of 'self-reflection' is activated here through the use of a 'couch', as opposed to what we have seen in the first advertisement where the use of the 'mirror' initially occupied the symbolic space. It is my view that the 'couch' here – a classic signifier of psychoanalysis – resonates with the discourses of *HTLGN*, in which female participants are free to 'talk' about all their fears, anxieties and feelings towards their 'naked' bodies without any judgment coming from Gok Wan. The 'couch' then acts as a symbolic reference and/or object of all the postfeminist reflective accounts of body-loathing



experience and practices that were expressed throughout a variety of cases explored on *HTLGN* and which, in turn, enabled the notion of emotional relatedness to potentially come forth between participant and viewer. This symbolic depiction of the couch operates in all consciousness as a cultural renewal of the ‘postfeminist’ opportunity and confirms the ‘holding environment’ that Gok Wan has created through the construction of the makeover setting, thus reminding us of his ‘charismatic’ skill in bringing into cultural and conscious awareness unspoken postfeminist experiences on body related concerns. The couch also stands for a symbolic representation of the reconfiguration of the style/designer expert embracing the role of a mentor/therapist. As I argued in Chapter 2, this reconfiguration of the makeover expert is emblematic of the culturally mediated turn towards a more therapeutic makeover discourse. Gok Wan’s image thus becomes an embodiment of that ‘therapeutic’ turn and his mediated presence validates the concept that ‘therapy culture’ is not only embedded within our popular culture but also systematically evolves through various popular media channels of communication.

Turning back to the *mise-en-scène* of the advertisement, I want to reveal an additional meaning for the symbolic reflections of therapy between the first and second *Activia* commercial texts. In the earlier *Activia* commercial, the notion of self-reflection is triggered through the replication of the *HTLGN* mirror sequence process, along with Gok Wan’s presence standing next to a female subject. In the second commercial, the mirror and the reflective practices are now associated with the manifestation of the couch, which puts more emphasis on the notion of therapeutic practices. What is more, the location of Gok Wan behind the couch

sketches a stereotypically popular vision of a 'therapeutic' situation, with Gok occupying the symbolic role of a 'therapist' who encourages his participants to engage in the practices of self-reflection as part of their emotional transformation process in the makeover experience. Therefore, I consider the couch as serving a purpose in the construction of Gok Wan as a mediated figure who indicates the importance of self-awareness of inner subjective experiences. Moreover, the appearance of the couch in such an interpretation confirms my earlier analysis that sees the development of the couch from a familiar television prop into a cultural object that connotes the notion of therapy/therapeutic culture. Therefore, the purpose of the couch in the advertisement acts as an essential 'object' that enables Gok Wan, as a media persona, to become an overt symbolic manifestation of the popular therapeutic discourses and practices that he activated in the *HTLGN* framework of experience.

Here we see how the reverie discussed above signals the unconscious investments and workings of the *HTLGN* experience. The blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality at the outset of the advertisement prefigures the actions of the female subjects. In this advertisement, the woman is seen opening the door with her keys to find that the lights of her home have been switched on, giving her the impression that someone is inside. Once she walks into the house and enters the room, she looks around at all the decorative changes that have taken place. She acknowledges these by looking at the already lit candles and smiles, as if she is aware in her mind of who is responsible for those caring gestures and expressions of love. She looks around all surprised and content, recognising and mentally acknowledging that all the stylistic makeover alterations have been performed by

Gok Wan. As the commercial's story unfolds, the woman then makes her way inside the living room, where the couch and Gok Wan are located. As the woman walks towards the couch, she walks close to the 'charismatic' expert. However, once the woman walks around the made over space and sits 'on the couch' looking blissful and relaxed, she does not appear to make any eye contact with Gok Wan. Nor does she establish any form of communication with him. The fact that Gok Wan is unacknowledged means that he exists within the unconscious textures of fantasy – a phantasy figure.

With this in mind, I will now turn to the psychoanalytic frame of thinking about the 'charismatic' figure of Gok Wan as that of a mentor/therapist who has now transitioned from the outer space of the *HTLGN* setting to the inner world and mental space of the makeover postfeminist experience. It is my view that the advertisement depicts Gok Wan as a cultural figure who has now become unconsciously internalised, in popular media culture, as a 'good' therapist of the psyche by his female participants, viewers and followers. The symbolic manifestation of Gok Wan's development into a culturally internalised 'good' object therapist aims to support the view that, after the termination of the *HTLGN* series, Gok Wan's makeover methods and self-reflective practices are firmly established in popular mediated culture, encouraging postfeminist experiences to be continually explored, reflected and emotionally understood even in his absence. Such a reading becomes apparent through the various visual connotations and metaphors that are at play in the format and setting of the advertisement under discussion. Also, the popular depiction of Gok Wan as an unconsciously internalised good therapist figure in culture and psyche will be further explained,

in the following section, to make a case for my argument of his cultural authority today in popular media culture, which in turns confirms the influence and impact of his methods outside the *HTLGN* procedural setting.



*Figure 65: The woman sits comfortably ‘on the couch’ and Gok Wan stands behind her*

As noted above and as Figure 65 illustrates, the woman now sits ‘on the couch’ looking blissful and relaxed. Gok Wan is behind the couch fiddling with the cushion but the woman still does not look aware of his presence. At this instance, we can look at this commercial moment through the psychoanalytic lens of object relations. The depiction of the woman sitting comfortably on the couch gives the impression of feeling ready to reflect and let go of any daily emotional anxieties. As clearly depicted in Figure 65, Gok Wan is adjusting the cushion on the couch, the woman strokes the smooth surface/fabric of the couch with her hand, as though the softness of the ‘object’ allows her to feel more relaxed and comforted. Undoubtedly, the couch operates here in the form of a ‘transitional object’ that

activates an area of experience, as suggested in Chapter 4; the transitional object 'is not an internal object (which is a mental concept), it is a possession' (Winnicott, 1953:94).

At this point, it is important to signpost the development of the 'couch' as a transitional object and its symbolic use in the popular makeover culture as an object that facilitates aspects of the feminine subjective experience. As Winnicott's theory reminds us, the notion of the object as transitional indicates the stage of emotional development from object relating to object use. For Winnicott, the value for the object is created once it survives destruction by the individual and thus continues to exist in fantasy. The symbolic manifestation of the couch as an object is emblematic of psychoanalytic practices and techniques that have survived destruction within the popular makeover discourse. The initial appearance of the couch in the makeover frame manifested itself through its depiction as a tired looking object that is ripped in many areas. The ripped image of the couch signifies in my view Winnicott's destruction of the object. The potential value of the couch to be used as a meaningful possession was initially contemplated by the *CR* designer and through the portrayal of its team members seated 'on the couch' reflecting on their dreams. As Chapter 2 suggested, bringing the couch 'out' on the street signalled the emergence of the therapy frame and its democratisation. The crystallised view of the couch as a 'comfort object' was established in the *HTLGN* use of the couch as an essential makeover prop. As figure 43 illustrated, the couch has 'survived' and transitioned back into the private space/room. The makeover expert/designer, Gok Wan, no longer contemplates its value but he is confident of its 'emotional significance'. Such a reading becomes symbolically apparent in

Sonya's naked photo-therapeutic challenge where the 'black and white' frame that captured her 'naked' self-confident depiction of lying on the couch is evocative of dream work analysis. In addition, the couch also facilitated the next phase of Sonya's emotional transformation where she sits 'on the couch' while reflecting on her makeover challenge with Gok Wan beside her. My psychoanalytic exploration of the makeover format and the role and position of the couch as an object evocative of the practice of psychoanalytic techniques in the popular media domain has ultimately become more concrete here. Having facilitated the development of the couch to be used as a valuable object to activate self-reflective practices and enabled the emotional exploration of the self, Gok Wan has now transitioned behind the couch and no longer sits by the female subject, as the *Activia* commercial illustrates. The woman, who now sits by herself on the *HTLGN* couch, recognises the function and the object's potential, thus accepting in reality that the object truly exists and she can continue to use it, love it and destroy it in fantasy. It can be symbolically suggested that by stroking blissfully the surface of the couch the woman says: "Hullo [couch]!" "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*." (Winnicott, 1971:90, italics in original). The female subject is stroking the cushion and looking away while Gok Wan is adjusting it, and this validates the view that Gok Wan is not physically present, but his qualities are alive in her fantasy. In his theoretical framework on the concept of the transitional object, Winnicott writes:

The infant can employ a transitional object when the internal object is alive and real and good enough (not too persecutory).

But this internal object depends for its qualities on the existence and aliveness and behaviour of the external object (breast, mother figure, general environmental care).

(Winnicott, 1953:94)

Therefore, one can argue that in this *Activia* moment the ‘good enough’ Gok Wan operates within the female subject’s inner (mental) space/world. The transition of Gok Wan as cultural object has been internalised, as any ‘good’ therapist would be, by its ‘good’ postfeminist women. I will now turn to a psychoanalytically informed reading to signal the internalisation of a therapist by his/her client and how this facilitates the continuation of therapy practice and emotional development of the client outside the consulting room.

#### Gok Wan’s development as a culturally internalised object

The work offered by Sarah Knox et al. (1999:244) outlines that the ‘clients’ internal representations of their therapists can be defined as clients bringing to awareness the internalized “image” (occurring in visual, auditory, felt presence, or combined forms) of their therapists when not actually with them in session. In these internal representations, clients have an image of the living presence of their therapist as a person’. Internal representations of therapists may be helpful to clients. For example, Jerome Singer and Kenneth Pope (1978:21) asserted that ‘[clients] in a sense adopt the therapists as a kind of imaginary companion, someone to whom they talk privately in their minds ... gradually assimilating what in effect the [therapist] has been teaching [them] about a process of self-examination and heightened self-awareness’. Furthermore, Knox et al. claimed

that the internalisation of the therapist serves as a method of assisting the client to continue the work of therapy outside the clinic, stating that:

In the same way that the growth and performance of those learning to play a musical instrument, or learning a particular sport, are enhanced by work and practice outside the scope of any formal lesson, so, too, many clients' healing and growth can be enhanced by their continued therapeutic "work" beyond the actual consultation hour. Clients' internal representations may be the "homework" of therapy, as well as the psychological connective tissue between successive sessions ... that enables clients to continue the work of therapy in the therapists' absence. As one client stated, "It was like a continuation of the analysis ... [I] sort of imagine myself being [in the consultation room], and what would happen there, and how I would think". (Knox et al., 1999: 245)

As I have outlined throughout my thesis, I do not consider the *HTLGN* setting and the role of Gok Wan equivalent of the analytic work provided in the consulting room by qualified analysts; however I will present a psychoanalytic reading of how the *Activia* campaign allows us to recognise the unconscious internalisation of Gok Wan as a 'good therapist' figure, allowing us to understand his symbolic function as a postfeminist emblem of cultural authority and as a psychical object in the psyche of postfeminist women in contemporary popular media culture.

In the *Activia* setting, even though Gok Wan is not physically present, his 'felt presence' is experienced by the female in her 'home'. Gok Wan's 'felt presence' is suggested through the reverie moment that is activated throughout the production of the advert, and thus he is experienced by the ordinary woman through the various postfeminist and therapeutic practices that he activates. So, the symbolic metaphors of therapy through the tranquil atmosphere, the aromatherapy and most importantly the use of the couch as a 'transitional object' conjure up all



the practices and objects that are significant and emblematic of Gok Wan's *HTLGN* method. All of these 'combined methods' serve as a psychoanalytic means of activating a 'constructive' postfeminist experience where ordinary feminine subjective understanding in relation to the body are reflected, negotiated and emotionally explored in an attempt to generate an emotional postfeminist awareness.

What is more, Gok Wan's cultural authority as a symbol in the realm of therapeutic culture today is now associated with his visual depiction standing behind the couch, which symbolically resonates with the psychoanalytic setting. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the seating arrangement of psychoanalysis involves the patient, who is usually on the couch, facing away from the psychoanalyst. It has been said that 'the foundation of psychoanalytic treatment, upon which everything else rests, is the psychoanalytic setting' (Modell, 1990:23). From this it follows that the concept of the therapeutic setting may be Freud's greatest contribution to technique, because without the special criteria of the setting, free association is not possible - indeed, treatment itself is not possible. The central importance of the psychoanalytic setting is to provide a space in 'which healing can occur and connections with previously repressed, split-off and lost aspects of the self can be re-established' (Rycroft, 1985:123). Winnicott, at an early stage in his work, described the arrangement of the analytic setting and its procedure by summarising Freud's ideas. In his 1955 paper, 'Clinical Varieties of Transference', Winnicott wrote:

The work was to be done in a room ... that was quiet, yet not dead quiet and not free from ordinary house noises. This room

would be lit properly, but not by a light staring in the face, and not by a variable light. The room would certainly not be dark and it would be comfortably warm. The patient would be lying on a couch ... comfortable ... and probably a rug ... would be available. (Winnicott, 1955:285)

Therefore, the psychoanalytic sketch that is produced in the advertisement is suggestive of all metaphors of the therapeutic and indicative of the continuation of the *HTLGN* practices outside the makeover setting. The *Activia* woman ‘on the couch’ who talk[s] privately [to Gok Wan] in her mind, and the psychoanalytic atmosphere that has been created by the ‘charismatic’ expert has activated a therapeutic presence and a felt [postfeminist] experience that assimilated the self-reflective practices that have been acquired and established through his *HTLGN* method. What then becomes apparent is that Gok Wan’s ‘felt presence’ as an internalised cultural object is evident throughout popular postfeminist media forms of experiences when questions around ‘feeling good’ about oneself, body-confidence, self-esteem and any issues or practices of body related concern are being negotiated.

Outside the *HTLGN* setting and with reference to the role of the couch in popular media culture, it is important to add commentary to my approach of applying psychoanalytic ideas to the study of makeover culture. As noted in Chapter 2, the figure of the tired-looking couch in the *CR* setting potentially signified the stereotypical view in culture of psychoanalysis, as a theory and form of therapy that is old, outworn, thus no longer useful and with almost no place in our culture today. However, my object relations psychoanalytic exploration of *HTLGN* and now of the *Activia* advertisement’s use of the couch serves as a revival of psychoanalysis in culture and leads to a new way of understating the inner and

outer working of contemporary media experiences. Even though in its 1996 *CR* depiction psychoanalysis is connoted as tired and dented, its role today is more prominent than ever and thus now becomes a point of reference in our popular media culture. It is through the psychoanalytic lens that one can explore the emotional processes and investments involved in our engagement not only with popular media formats and practices but also with the need to relate and culturally internalise dominant popular cultural figures, where their experiences and guidance through their media depiction assists us into the formation, restoration and/or renewal of our object relations and processes that might have been disturbed, disrupted or not properly formed.

On the whole, what this commercial setting aims to do, through the blurry representation of reverie and ‘psychoanalytic’ nuances, is to situate *HTLGN*’s creative and reflective practices as a place of ‘maximally intense experience’ (Winnicott, 1971:135). The sense of emotionally intensified experience and a state of reverie is carried forward symbolically to the following commercial situation.

### ***Activia’s mirrors: The How To Look Good Naked Labyrinth***

This third advertisement steps away from the *HTLGN* setting and the relationship between expert and makeover subject as depicted in the previous advertisements of the campaign. As my reading will show, an ‘out of conscious awareness’ transformational process comes forth that accentuates the ‘therapeutic’ potential of the makeover method for the style/expert himself, which then allows me to add to my commentary on Gok Wan as a cultural makeover object. Gok Wan’s public

media confession of his former body related struggles, which he reflectively expressed in his published autobiography, media interviews and in the *HTLGN* makeover setting, has shaped his public persona into an emblematic feature of what Richards and Brown (2011) term as a ‘therapeutic driver’ within the popular mediated makeover setting. Within the wider proliferation of ‘therapeutic culture’, Richards and Brown state that a ‘damaged’ person is ‘one who had known emotional difficulty but had developed through that, and who was able to represent both adversity and recovery’ and they go on to argue that:

Popular media presentations of damage and repair, and of internal conflict and struggle in well-known individuals create the potential for wide dissemination of a more tolerant or compassionate understanding of what constitutes “normality”. With this come opportunities and incentives for other individuals to learn from, and perhaps to compare themselves reflexively with, the iconic example. (Richards and Brown, 2011:24)

Therefore, the therapeutic representation of Gok Wan, who has encountered similar ‘naked’ body related anxieties, fears and emotional troubles to the ones expressed by his makeover participants has allowed him to be identified as a public figure who is now culturally identified as ‘been there’ and ‘knows how’ to deal with the problem. The construction of his ‘charismatic’ public persona was profoundly enhanced through *HTLGN* and in the later media projects concerning issues around the body. Gok Wan’s public confrontation of the self – his public persona – has culturally confirmed his reflective methods and approaches since he has negotiated recovery from his ‘problems’, indicating that one can learn from his experience.

The following *Activia* advertisement becomes a symbolic representation of that recovery and aims to accentuate his prominence as a ‘transformational’ postfeminist vehicle who signals emotional self-awareness on current themes around feminine subjective experiences in relation to the body.

The opening shot of the following advertisement, which aired on May 12th 2013, takes place in an amusement park (Figure 66) with Gok Wan standing out from the crowd (Figure 67).



*Figure 66: Ad's Opening shot*



*Figure 67: Gok Wan welcomes us  
in the amusement park*

The backdrop of the amusement park is closely associated with the notion of playfulness and access into a fantasy space with illusory qualities – a concept connotative of leisure, childhood, joy and special treats. From a psychoanalytic point of view, one could argue that the location of the amusement park accentuates the notion of cultural experience, since it offers opportunities for creativity, discovery and inner subjective experiences through its rides and is therefore

suggestive of inducing an excess of emotions and ‘maximal intense experience’ for those who choose to enter and search themselves within that space. From the *HTLGN* connotative spectrum, the scene connotes the numerous playful and illusionary elements that are embedded within the show. Its female subjects choose to enter into the playful yet self-reflective space of *HTLGN*, which is full of potential and the excess of emotions come to the fore. However, as the following screenshot (Figure 68) suggests, it is not a female subject who steps into one of the amusement’s rides but Gok Wan himself.



*Figure 68: Gok Wan talks to us through his mirror reflection from a red room setting*

The above shot depicts a clear camera focus on Gok Wan’s facial expression. Through these frames we get a blurry view of the room inside and the impression that he is inside a red interior room surrounded by full-length mirrors. Since the advert takes place in an amusement park, the red room where Gok Wan is depicted is suggestive of a mirror maze or hall of mirrors, an image that is symbolic of a maze-like puzzle. Participants who enter into such amusement spaces are given

mirrors as obstacles, and glass panes separate off parts of the maze they cannot access. Sometimes the mirrors may be distorted because of different curves in the glass – convex or concave – giving the participants unusual and confusing reflections of themselves, some humorous and others frightening.

As the image above illustrates, Gok Wan talks directly to the camera lens through the mirror and we as viewers receive his reflective narratives. Gok Wan's repeated emphasis throughout the advert and the tag line 'from within' contribute to our understanding that these images connote the inner world. The concept of inner world is connoted not only by Gok Wan's reflective mirroring but also by the actual inner space where he is located. Therefore, the amusement park and the hall of mirrors are connotative of the representation of the inner and outer worlds of the self. As the camera pans out (Figures 69 and 70) there is an overlay of symbolic signification that echoes towards the basic essentials of Gok Wan's own personal *HTLGN* experience and narratives. Before entering into the psychoanalytic discussion of Gok Wan's experience in the mirror maze, it is important to interrogate the unconscious suggestiveness of the commercial backdrop and how this contributes to my overall reading of *HTLGN* as a cultural object with postfeminist significance.



*Figure 69: Gok Wan looks at his distorted to mirror reflection*



*Figure 70: Gok Wan continues to stare at his reflection looking deeply troubled*

Starting with the red interior setting, Gok Wan's entrance and portrayal into a red-room is a potent symbol of a return to the womb. Returning to the womb indicates the opportunity for one to be born again. The process of finding one's way out of the womb induces the experience of excessive emotions. As Chapter 5 has investigated, Gok Wan's empathetic stance and emotional knowingness about his



subject's body-related concerns derive from his childhood experience of body related anxieties that later developed into eating disorders. Therefore, Gok Wan's distorted mirror image of his silhouette acts as a reflective reminder of that time and operates as a 'return' to the distorted mirroring experience and body related concerns of his childhood. An inner 'return' of subjective experience induces an array of emotional resistances and feelings of anger, fear and anxiety, all of which stand for an unpleasant life experience and/or an indescribable trauma that is out of consciousness awareness or never verbally articulated. The proposed reading of a childhood 'return' in juxtaposition with the emotional reflection upon these experiences reads as a popular view of a psychoanalytic 'ride'. This typification of the 'talking cure' allows for the state of reverie to carry on and perpetuate my reading of *HTLGN*'s 'therapeutic' qualities.

Now it is important to turn to the suggestiveness of the mirrors and the distorted reflection in the commercial setting. 'Halls of distorted mirrors are methodologically appealing sites for an inquiry into emotional process' (Katz, 1996:1195). Once Gok Wan has entered into the red room, he pauses before the mirror and studies his reflection. As Figures 69 and 70 illustrate, Gok Wan is standing in front of the mirror, which reflects a distorted image of his own figure but not of his face. However, he is observing his distorted reflection with discomfort and discontent, as we can witness in both camera frames. The camera lens allows us, the viewer, to witness what he observes in the mirror and how he makes sense of his distorted image. The position of the camera behind the self-scrutinising Gok Wan is evocative of the *HTLGN* mirror sequence of the initial makeover challenge. However, instead of Gok Wan standing behind the female

subject who is self-reflecting, the camera positions us in his place and permits us 'to see a distorted image and ... see the raw fact that the person is regarding his distorted image' (Katz, 1996:1201).

Although we witness the body distortion of Gok Wan, nevertheless in the mirror we can observe that the makeover expert is dealing with his body-dysmorphia on his own, as no one is standing beside him to absorb, contain and/or guide him in order to make sense of his encounter with the mirror. Clearly this depiction visually illustrates Gok Wan's biographical and descriptive narratives of his former 'naked' experience in front of the 'ornate mirror' and validates my analysis that there is an absence of any maternal mirroring and this leaves him feeling inadequate and unable to recognise those painful emotions that are reflected in the 'mirror'.

In the plot structure of the advert, Gok Wan is self-reflecting, and thus is 'aware' that he is being seen in the mirror and that his self-scrutinising is also seen. 'The two may thus share a target of perception and an awareness that the other shares the view' (Katz, 1996:1201). Therefore, as Jack Katz (1996:1201) writes, 'the mirror's image had bounced in the three directions: directly back to the reflected person, directly back to an observer on the side-line and indirectly back to the observer who is also noting how the reflected party receives the image'.

In addition, he states that:

Funhouse mirrors crystallize a challenge that haunts all social interaction. The mirrors take the appearance a

person presents to the world, and they throw back a distorted version of his or her identity and with it the challenge to make sense of the distortion. In a way, the same distortion occurs in all social relations, as the others with whom we interact always have an understanding of ourselves that is, with respect to the identities we project, somewhat off-the-mark – perhaps overly flattering, perhaps maliciously uncomplimentary, perhaps just a bit uncomprehending and weird ... The ways the mirrors are worked differ for different visitors: some adopt frozen poses and see a static caricature; some walk back and forth, varying their distance from the mirror to animate a bizarre character; some merge their image with that of another in their group. The metaphors elicited from the mirrors differ for different visitors: some play on fat/thin variations from “normal” body form, some develop their possibilities as waddling ducks, some become strongmen or puppets or squiggly worms. (Katz, 1996:1228-9)

Both references suggest a symbolic portrayal similar to the procedural method of *HTLGN*, which involves the subject’s self-reflective narratives while observing herself before the full-length mirror. In this advertisement, Gok Wan’s distorted reflection operates as a replica of his own perception concerning the makeover subject’s distorted body image perception. It is my view that these two frames also operate as a cultural reference and a popular reminder of Gok Wan’s own body distorted mirroring experiences that he encountered during his obesity struggles as well as his eating disorders. However, the mirror metaphor of Gok Wan’s reflections plays on an almost monstrous form of deformity. Gok Wan scrutinises something frightening, but he nevertheless continues to look at his deformity, a literal attempt to symbolise unspeakable psychological experience, one that is activated in the symbolically red representation of the ‘womb’. As my analysis has already indicated, Gok Wan’s former body related anxieties and experiences were out of his conscious awareness, and the emotional pain that he ‘tried so hard to forget’ (Gok Wan, 2010:262) was activated through his self-conscious

involvement in his subjects' reflective narratives during the mirror sequence of the *HTLGN* procedure. Therefore, these two commercial frames connotatively operate as a cultural reminder of Gok Wan's own earlier body related anxieties that he has publicly disclosed through his autobiography, media interviews and more profoundly within the reflective space of the *HTLGN* discourse. Once these autobiographical visual references have been established, the next shot (Figure 71) illustrates Gok Wan symbolically *walking through* this former body related struggles and pains and potentially overcoming his emotional resistances. As the screenshot illustrates, one can view the multiple images of Gok Wan in the mirror reflection, which signals in my view the expansion of Gok Wan as a cultural object outside the confined space of *HTLGN*. Such a reading is validated through Gok Wan's post-*HTLGN* engagement with various projects concerning body-confidence, self-esteem and in some cases with eating disorders, all of which stem from his own subjective experiences of body-loathing.



*Figure 71: Gok Wan walks out of the distorted mirror stage*

In the above image, Gok Wan is depicted as having found his way out of the earlier distorted mirror maze experience with assurance and a sense of direction. Looking at the mirror representation of Gok Wan's silhouette is suggestive of the different/advanced phase that he has achieved within the 'mirror sequence' challenge. Additionally, Gok Wan's mirror reflection, which is now framed and reproduced in a lineal fashion, indicates that he is walking in a straight line within a maze, indicative of finding his way out of a labyrinth and into the external reality. The lighting of this frame is shadowy and the mirrors do not (re)produce any reflection of Gok Wan's figure in the backdrop. Gok Wan is depicted as walking out of a hidden and dark location having achieved self and emotional awareness. Therefore, the commercial is indicative of a therapeutic makeover journey that begins with Gok Wan's depiction in the 'womb' which indicates a distressing experience, that engages him in an emotional transformation and guides him towards a liberating experience that signals the (re)birth of his new sense of integrated self. The reflection here that depicts Gok Wan walking in a 'straight' line out of the maze (or symbolically through a birth canal) is suggestive of the completion of an internal process and emotional struggle. As an attempt to parallel the therapeutic tropes, the depiction of Gok Wan's distorted mirroring at the beginning of the advert connotes the 'before' stage of the makeover experience and the accomplishment of attuned mirroring connotes the 'after', which is then suggestive of the emotional transformation and/or the makeover 'reveal'. The notion of the transformation is an emotional as well as a perceptive one that is validated through the visual manifestation of Gok Wan's changed mirror reflection and not of his attire. Therefore, the mirror in this setting develops into a

‘facilitating’ object that confirms that emotional transformation, a process which is loaded with emotional investments and unconscious processes.

Reflecting back to the *HTLGN* discourse, the setting here explicitly draws on its transformational core, which is entirely focused on the significance in altering the subject’s distorted body image perception by challenging their emotional resistances and engaging in emotional conflicts. This is an attempt to arrive at a more perceptively attuned mirroring stage of experience that entails developing an accurate inner self-reflection of themselves and their body-image when looking into the mirror.

Mirrors are potent vehicles for self-revelation and self-hatred, self-assurance and self-doubt. The mirror and the gazer may enter into a magical relationship in which aspects of even the whole self may be changed and/or reinvented. The mirror reflects, refracts, or distorts each image reflected upon and underlines the internal struggles for identity. We look in the mirror to find our reflection looking back at us; there is an intrinsic discontent (dissatisfaction) between the image we perceive and the self we experience. When we finally realise that we are not that reflection, it reinforces our sense of self. Therefore, it can be suggested that the three mirror maze is a symbolic depiction of Gok Wan’s own experience and the emotional impact associated with the makeover space of *HTLGN*. The mirror maze opens up a potential space for playing and illusion as a means of discovering and exploring one’s self potential.

As mentioned above, the image of Gok Wan walking out of the maze suggests that he has found his way out of the labyrinth. In the hall of mirrors, there is no image to be seen unless the viewer enters into that potential space of experience. The notion of the maze or labyrinth is symptomatic of the concept of entering into a space where one can ‘get lost’ and need to find his/her way out again. Caroline Savitz writes that:

The labyrinth itself provides us with a paradoxical image: it holds a tension between order and chaos, pattern and disarray, clarity and confusion, depending on the perspective of the viewer; how we experience the maze depends upon where we stand. From inside the maze, disorientation reigns. To the maze walker without a map or a guide, the path appears random, chaotic, and disorientating ... One may wander with exhaustion, never reaching the goal or centre — and even wonder if there is a pattern at all. (Savitz, 1991:462)

Here I would like to concentrate on the connotative concept of labyrinth, a term that in my view is psychoanalytically potent. The word ‘*labyrinthos*’ itself has been translated practically intact from Ancient Greek to the most modern European languages. As the work of Savitz inform us, ‘the Middle English spelling of the word was “*laborintus*” from “*labor*” and “*intus*” and, in the characteristic medieval fascination with etymology, they emphasised the “*labor*” aspect – the internal difficulty of the maze’ (Savit, 1991:467). It is the concept of ‘internal difficulty’, which is suggestive of the *HTLGN* self-reflective mirror challenge. Therefore, the concept of labyrinth is worth psychoanalytically exploring in order to make sense of the symbolic connotation of this advertisement. My analysis will showcase Gok Wan’s evolution into a modern (Ariadne) figure and shaper of a

more self-aware postfeminism, one that he appropriated through the ‘holding’ architecture of the *HTLGN* experience.

The concept of the labyrinth resonates with the Greek mythological story of the Minotaur. In the Greek myth of Ariadne and the Labyrinth, the string or thread makes it possible for Theseus to enter the Labyrinth, kill the Minotaur, and find his way out of the maze. The concept of the labyrinth requires ‘a continual process of choice or the assistance of a guide to overcome the disorientation, confusion, and exhaustion of wrong decisions’ (Doob, 1990:47). The form of Minotaur represents a ‘collision of the divine and human, of the sacred and the profane – as symbolised in the monstrous creation of the Minotaur, half human, half sacred beast’ (Savitz, 1991:465). The structure of the labyrinth becomes as dangerous as the Minotaur itself and it functions as a ‘transitional space’ to facilitate the passage to the inner world. Therefore, Theseus entering into the labyrinth connotes the ‘losing his orientation’, ‘plunging into the unknown’, ‘taking the step into darkness’. In this regard, one could argue that the concept of the labyrinth is a symbolic representation of the ‘analytic process itself’ (Savitz, 1991).

James Grotstein explains:

Theseus' journey through the confounding maze, guided as he was by Ariadne's thread, seems rather transparently to represent the exploration of the Unconscious itself. The Minotaur appears to represent a composite image of internal demonic objects that, imagined as presiding at the centre of the labyrinth ... symbolize the experience of ego-development being imprisoned, as it were, by psychical conflict. (Grotstein, 1997:589)



Here, the ‘analytic’ concept of the labyrinth is symbolically connected to the makeover process of *HTLGN* and most importantly of the concept of self-reflection, a process that leads to the hidden and unresolved corners and aspects of the self. When the female subject arrives in the makeover space where Gok Wan is located, she is invited to enter into her own mental labyrinth. This emotional entry is instigated through the subject’s ‘naked’ mirror reflection which challenges the emotional resistance of the makeover participant, thus enabling her to encounter and in all probability conquer her own body related demons and unspeakable experiences – a body related battle that is being depicted and reflected through Gok Wan’s own distorted body image reflection in the ‘womb’. As discussed in my analysis earlier, Gok Wan’s body has been distorted in the mirror reflection but not his face. This observation is indicative of the half-human and half-beast mythical conception of the Minotaur. The internal struggles against distorted body image reflection are symptomatic of the concept of entering the labyrinth and fighting the bull. The advertisement is suggestive of Gok Wan’s own experiences and battles with his own body related demons, and this is the kind of search that he asks his makeover subjects and viewers to employ in an attempt to achieve a more conscious sense of subjective experience and psychological well-being. However, to fight the Minotaur, one needs the help and guidance of Ariadne or in the case of the *HTLGN* the supervision, and coaching of Gok Wan.

In the Greek myth, it is the string/thread that Ariadne provides that makes it possible for Theseus ‘to leave a secure and familiar place and venture into the unknown without fear of being unable to find his way back ‘home’, because the thread will guide him’ (Kuhn, 2013:13). The concept of the ‘string’ here then holds

a symbolic function: it holds things together to stop them from getting lost or falling apart and bridges the familiar with the unknown as well as offering comfort and security.

Here, the work of Winnicott on the concept of the ‘transitional object’ becomes pertinent. In an ‘object related’ form, the string becomes an object of communication that bridges the external reality of the infant/child/adult from illusion and of getting lost, thus enabling one to travel ‘in and across space between subject and object’ (Philips, 1988:118). In a brief case study of 1960, Winnicott reveals the story of a boy whose primary means of communication is with a length of string that he always carried with him and was always preoccupied with. The boy’s parents confirmed to Winnicott (1971:17) that the boy’s obsession with string was gradually increasing when ‘they went into a room ... to find that [the boy] had joined together chairs and tables; and they might find a cushion, for instance, with a string joining it to the fireplace. [The] boy’s preoccupation with string was gradually developing a new feature ... [that caused the parents concern when he] ... tied a string around his [younger] sister’s neck’. The boy’s obsession with string, as Winnicott explains to the parents, arises because their son was dealing with the fear of separation at times when the mother was absent for giving birth, as well as when he was hospitalised for depression, which brought a stronger experience of separation between mother and child. Therefore, ‘the boy’s obsession with the string was an attempt on the boy’s part to disavow his fears’ (Kuhn, 2013:13). Drawing a comparison with the telephone, Winnicott (1971:17) pointed out that in this instant the string was being used as a form of

communication and suggests that ‘string joins, just as it also helps in the wrapping up of objects and in the holding of unintegrated material’.

Gok Wan’s use of string as a means of communication, during the subject’s makeover journey, becomes apparent in different shapes and symbolic forms, either through the use of a rope or of a walkie-talkie. In my analysis of the makeover text, I pointed out the symbolic types of threads that Gok Wan uses in ‘holding’ his subjects together emotionally and mentally throughout the process. First, it is Gok Wan’s voice, a channel of *HTLGN* communication that soothes, comforts and emotionally guides the subjects during their ‘naked’ makeover challenge. In the case of Nikki, Gok Wan made available the ‘holding’ qualities of his voice through the umbilical symbolism of the walkie-talkie, which guided his subject in the emotional challenge to battle her fears and come out of her labyrinth confident and self-assured. Another example that connotes the concept of the thread is the use of a ‘rope’ that Gok Wan used in Leanne’s case to exercise her emotional dependence on ‘tights’ to hide her body related anxieties. What is significant here about the makeover moment is the depiction of Leanne holding one end of the rope in the makeover challenge and Gok Wan symbolically holding the other end of the rope which is tied on a portable dressing screen located in the makeover setting. Therefore, the entrance into the labyrinth and ‘this trope of psychical movement back and forth across boundaries or frontiers, of entering and leaving spaces’ (Kuhn, 2013:15) is connotative of the concept of Winnicott’s ‘potential space’ (Winnicott, 1971). As a result, the symbolic use of the string connotes that if you do not want to get lost you need to follow Ariadne, or Gok Wan, as modern day replacement. For his female makeover subjects, Gok Wan

becomes the string and thread through the guidance that he makes available to them. When the *HTLGN* subjects enter into the internal labyrinth, Gok Wan remains in the outer world directing his subjects when entering into their hidden and unresolved body related struggles. The makeover process of *HTLGN* is symptomatic of an emotional labour, a ‘working through’ and a fighting process to achieve and attain a more consciously aware and emotionally understood experience of feminine subjectivity. This process is clearly echoed in the advertisement under analysis here.

This commercial process then becomes a symbolic re-enactment of Gok Wan’s personal experiences as analogous of the ones he encounters along with his female makeover subject and the ones he discovered about himself in the *HTLGN* process. As I have psychoanalytically demonstrated in preceding chapters, there is a parallel signification between Gok Wan’s former mirror experiences and that of the ‘mirroring’ makeover challenges that he sets out for his female participants. As already explored in the concept of the labyrinth, Gok Wan induces a self-reflective process and an emotional journey to fix the popular related distorted mirroring perceptions of his makeover subjects. That shared experience allows for the concept of emotional relatedness to transpire between Gok Wan and his female makeover subjects and the viewers as an extension of them, as well as to accentuate his emotional knowingness of their body related troubles. Once Gok Wan completes the mirror maze challenge and finds his way out of the labyrinth, he then finds his way back in the outer space, the amusement park. Therefore, the completion of the mirror maze challenge signifies the emotional transformation of

Gok Wan's former body related troubles that signal the emotional significance and 'therapeutic' impact of the *HTLGN* practice for the expert himself.

Overall, what makes the *HTLGN* experience carry an object related significance for the makeover subject (and viewer as its extension) ten years on is the 'holding' capacity of Gok Wan to assemble 'transitional spaces' that symbolically re-create a 'back into the womb' experience. A process where frustrations and disappointments in relation to the body are learned to be tolerated through 'play' and creative engagement with various aspects of self-experiences can be (re)discovered and thus facilitate an emotional 'release'. It is the 'therapeutic' experience of that emotional release that marks the transformation and (re)birth of the self and the renewal of object relations in the way in which women emotionally relate to their body experience.

Therefore, in our contemporary culture, where object relations are in crisis and individuals are in quest to attain self-knowledge, there is a continuous search for popular 'therapeutic individuals' to facilitate positive and constructive spaces that generate cultural opportunities where one can gain emotional awareness that leads to self-growth. By culturally engaging with popular therapeutic mediated spaces where emotional expressivity and feelingful reflectivity is facilitated, emotional attachments in relation to the self and others can be creatively restored.

As this thesis has argued, the *HTLGN* practice and the cultural location of Gok Wan in the setting have facilitated a 'cultural experience' through a therapeutic opportunity that accentuates the importance of making sense of troubled emotional

states rather than striving to avoid them. Moreover, Gok Wan's 'holding' practice considers the messy emotional textures of the self as part of a maturational process that leads to strengthen the core aspects of self because through them one can reflectively attain emotional awareness and reach meaningful interpretations of self-experience.

The holding environment facilitated by the 'good-enough' Fairy Gok-mother is central for the postfeminist opportunity that the makeover space has facilitated. The cultural opening that the makeover discourse has appropriated allowed for various postfeminist experiences to be safely voiced and taken seriously and not be ridiculed. Emotional and body related struggles related to breast cancer treatments, maternal ambivalence and social bullying, as well as links between such experiences and the body are brought into conscious awareness though the makeover's self-reflective practices and have created for ordinary women a cultural moment of postfeminist relief; a relief where body related struggles of female experiences no longer remain a taboo and can be reflectively explored and managed in a way that makes sense of them, facilitating emotional growth and self-understanding. The emotional relief that was created through the makeover opportunity and facilitated by Gok Wan throughout the running of the series stretches beyond the text, and in my view signals a postfeminist evolution. This postfeminist evolution is apparent through the therapeutic qualities that the makeover space can provide, by recognising maternal ambivalence and allowing the emotional struggles and disappointment of motherhood to be heard and not remain idealised as perfect feminine experience. Reflecting back on Lotz's (2001) work, this view confirms how postfeminism becomes a valuable description in

recognising and signalling shifts of current feminine emotional concerns and experiences throughout womanhood. The ‘holding’ and somewhat therapeutic postfeminist experience that *HTLGN* facilitated comes into view through practices that Gok Wan appropriated as ‘transformational’. These have been extended and become culturally internalised as a pathway that leads to an emotional awareness of the current feminine subjective experiences in relation to the body.

In conclusion, it is important to signal that my psycho-cultural reading has made visible the postfeminist opportunity that Gok Wan has generated and this has become apparent through my extensive application of Winnicott’s ideas to the makeover text. The psychoanalytic value of Winnicott’s work for the study and location of *HTLGN* as a place of ‘cultural experience’ has opened up a new dimension of reading and emotional understanding in relation to makeover culture and the way in which we constructively engage and make sense of our emotional subjective experiences. Ten years on, the Gok Wan phenomenon can be seen to have played a key role in shaping what we understand as ‘therapeutic’ culture, and the practices and procedures on show in *HTLGN* have come to reside in the contemporary media landscape as internalised and highly valuable cultural experiences, whose usefulness is activated through reflective exploration of emotional subjectivity, leading towards new processes of self-knowledge and the (re)formation of self-identity.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the therapeutic and cultural value of makeover television by psycho-culturally exploring the affective impact of Gok Wan's makeover approach in *HTLGN*. As I have shown, Gok Wan's makeover method culturally revolutionised the traditional makeover format due to its immense focus on the importance of self-reflection and emotional expression as a platform to transform troubled feminine experiences in relation to the body.

My project has offered an innovative reading of the study of makeover culture and has explored the role of emotions within the popular makeover frame of *HTLGN*. Applying Winnicott's object relations psychoanalytic ideas to the textual and narrative frames of the *HTLGN* setting, I have examined the emotional processes and unconscious investments that are at play during the participants' transformation of their embodied anxieties. In particular, I scrutinised the on-screen relationship that was formed between the 'charismatic' expert, Gok Wan, and his female participants to signal the way in which the expert facilitated the transformational process of his subject and, thus, the therapeutic impact of the *HTLGN* environment. Such analysis enabled me to identify the cultural and affective impact of Gok Wan's makeover method, allowing me to understand the expert's 'holding' capacity as formulating a culturally constructive environment in which female participants make sense of their troubled bodily experiences in 'safe' and reflective ways. The therapeutic potential of *HTLGN* became apparent through my analysis of Gok Wan's emotional and caring provision in guiding his makeover participants through a playful and creative journey that enabled them to gain a



meaningful sense of their inner subjective experience and this led to a deeper self-awareness and emotional growth.

Identified as a dominant and successful sub-genre of Reality TV, the cultural importance of makeover discourse, and particularly that of *HTLGN*, is foregrounded here because of its depiction of ‘ordinary’ women negotiating their current and everyday feminine troubles in relation to the body. Thanks to a generalised cultural awareness of its ‘mediated and edited nature’, *HTLGN* relays to viewers a ‘felt as real’ experience through its on-going presentation of women engaging in such encounters. Being concerned with ‘managing femininity’ (Berlant, 2008), the makeover format’s use of soap opera’s melodramatic aesthetics (Geraghty, 1991; Modleski, 1982) allows the *HTLGN* participants to operate as ‘emotional representatives’ for viewers since their body-image discontent, frustrations and insecurities are commonly experienced by ordinary women. This allows viewers to identify with the narratives of the makeover subjects, permitting identification with their body struggles, tearful expressions and gestures.

In *HTLGN*, the notion of melodrama is further emotionally accentuated through the participants’ reflective narratives in response to the naked depiction of their bodies in the full-length mirrors. The *HTLGN* ‘mirror sequence’ is where the ‘melodramatic body’ (Brooks, 1994) finds expression and becomes a signifier of emotional meanings and associations, acting as a canvas for unspoken postfeminist experiences. This allows the unconscious recollections and bodily struggles of the

participants to come to the surface and opens up space for interpretation in order for them to ‘work through’ their emotional resistances.

Furthering this psychoanalytic reading, it is in this moment that the notion of the therapeutic transpires in the setting, since the *HTLGN* mirrors activate a process of self-reflection. My work has identified Gok Wan’s makeover format as an emblematic feature that works as an outcome of what Richards (2007) optimistically refers to as ‘therapeutic culture’, since the format facilitates an emotional process towards acquiring self-knowledge through the experience of expressivity and self-reflection. An additional characteristic that crystallises the view of *HTLGN* as emblematic of therapeutic discourse is the apparent symbolic reconfiguration of the makeover expert into mentor/therapist, so that Gok Wan reveals a capacity and ‘emotional knowingness’ to guide his subjects through the psychological process of self-reflection.

My work has argued that the self-reflective practices and processes activated by Gok Wan, along with his capacity to facilitate the setting, frame a ‘holding environment’ that encourages a ‘safe’, postfeminist cultural opportunity for everyday women to negotiate hidden aspects of their feminine identity and emotionally express their subjective experiences in relation to body insecurities.

My discussion of the *HTLGN* experience as postfeminist has signalled that popular media definitions are ‘split’ in terms of their understanding of what constitutes a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ postfeminist body, and I have argued that this is key in fostering current feminine subjective experiences of body-loathing and body-insecurities. As

Debbie's case clearly illustrates, in Chapter 3, unrealistic definitions of the 'perfect' body in popular print media are culturally internalised by ordinary women as a source of happiness, emotional and psychological well-being, and postfeminist success. Inevitably, these ideal body image definitions leave ordinary women, like Debbie, to experience a form of 'splitting' (Klein, 1946; 1957; 1998) that activates persecutory feelings towards their own body fallibilities, since their imperfections are a site of failure to fit into the postfeminist dress.

My thesis has therefore argued that *HTLGN* provides for its female participants and by extension its viewers, a 'safe' postfeminist space where their current feminine subjective experiences can be safely expressed, with Gok Wan acknowledging that their 'real' bodies have value, potential and are 'good enough', requiring no surgical and/or cosmetic intervention. Extending this discussion, I have commented on the postfeminist celebration of the 'Yummy Mummy' phenomenon and the popular cultural perception that maternal experiences are filled with emotional goodness and reveal no sign of messiness. In Chapter 3, my psychoanalytic discussion of the case study material provided in Cindy and Jeannie's episodes showed how *HTLGN* also facilitates a space where maternal ambivalence can be safely voiced and find cultural expression, so that its messiness can be culturally acknowledged and recognised as a complex part of inner feminine experience in relation to the maternal that no longer needs to remain silent, emotionally uncharted and/or ignored. In these ways, my discussion has argued that the *HTLGN* format is a culturally constructive one, providing opportunities for the safe voicing of postfeminist emotional subjective experiences in relation to the body without fear of being interrupted or ridiculed. The presentation of a variety

of makeover cases drawn from the show clearly suggests that it provides an innovative, postfeminist experience filled with a therapeutic opportunity.

My case studies also identified key procedural elements of the *HTLGN* experience. The makeover sequence arranged by Gok Wan facilitates the participants' transformational journey towards an emotional exploration of their inner subjective experiences. This leads towards emotional discovery and more awareness of the self. Gok Wan's often 'good-enough' motherly stance in comforting and soothing his subjects in moments of frustration and his empathetic stance and emotional attunement towards their feminine struggles, anxieties and fears in relation to the body facilitate and support the procedural process in a meaningful way, and confirms again my reading of the makeover space as a 'holding environment'. The symbolic and physical 'holding' made available by Gok Wan allows his subjects to explore aspects of their inner self in relation to the body that were previously emotionally overwhelming, thus offering them a feeling of being understood.

The significance of Winnicott's theory has constituted an important analytical tool for the in-depth textual investigation of the makeover format in this project. Winnicott's ideas on the developmental sequence of 'object use' as well as the emotional significance of the 'transitional object' have been used to reveal how the *HTLGN* expert emotionally restores and/or renews the subjects' body-image definitions through the use of objects that they choose to hide or cover up their insecurities. This enables their self-growth and the emotional transformation of their feminine experiences through inner self discovery. This confirms the importance of the Winnicottian approach in providing us with a unique

psychoanalytic model to study the makeover format and explore the links between inner and outer reality that contribute to one's capacity to form a mature object relationship which cultivates personal development and facilitates psychological growth, thus allowing for a sense of self to develop.

Gok Wan's makeover technique and his use of fashion/stylistic skills and practices reveal the expert's 'good enough' capacity to generate creative opportunities, where aspects of the self can emerge through the playful engagement with real and/or symbolic objects related to the participant's inner self-experience. In Chapter 4, as my case study of Leanne illustrates, Gok Wan, by remodifying Leanne's robe into a backless dress in front of the *HTLGN* mirror while she is wearing it, generates moments of creative and self-reflective opportunities for his subject to (re)discover what already exists, and reach new modes of object relating definitions by forming new emotional associations in relation to the body.

Playful mechanisms are activated in the makeover situation to emotionally facilitate the subject's development toward emotional independence and inner self-discovery. As Nikki's case further illustrates (Chapter 4), Gok Wan's shop window challenge offered Nikki the cultural opportunity to engage her whole personality in a 'naked' experience that allowed her to restore the unhappy relationship with her body and develop a more conscious sense of emotional understanding of the self by reaching new (re)definitions of identity. Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis has been a valuable tool in identifying the development of the *HTLGN* setting into an 'intermediate area of experience' (Winnicott, 1971) which enables the makeover subject to creatively engage with her whole personality and

explore hidden aspects of inner self-experience to discover what is already there to be found that is one's body potential. Such opportunity allows the makeover participants to attain new emotional definitions in relation to the body which facilitate the (re)construction of the relational self.

By forming rich and creative frames for the emotional exploration of inner self-experiences that were previously hidden and/or unknown, the *HTLGN* makeover frame facilitates its subjects (and by extension the viewers) with a postfeminist opportunity to make sense of their body related troubles and acquire new emotional definitions in relation to the body through the playful discovery of inner self-experiences. This confirms the usefulness of Winnicott's object relations psychoanalysis in exploring the cultural significance of Gok Wan's makeover method. It is the power of play – within a holding (and a facilitating) environment – as well as the cultural engagement with objects that provide the *HTLGN* makeover participants with the opportunity for the identity of the self to develop a sense of aliveness and a capacity to 'going on being', all of which are vital for the continual emotional growth and discovery of the sense of self. It is in this instant that my project recognises that Gok Wan's makeover approach therapeutically cultivates a frame of 'cultural experience' for its subjects (and by extension the viewer), since its procedural 'sequence' facilitates the playful interaction between the subject and (comfort) object that leads towards the construction of a meaningful experience in relation to the body. This creative opportunity within the makeover frame generates a therapeutic possibility towards the emotional development of the self within culture, and society more broadly.

In the *HTLGN* setting, Gok Wan's caring and 'holding' function in providing emotional support to his female subjects is evident both through his physical presence by offering them a hug and providing the space to emotionally express their frustration. In my analysis, I have commented on Gok Wan's symbolic status as a 'good-enough' (Winnicott, 1971) maternal presence and on his capacity to propound emotional reassurance, to soothe the 'naked' fears and anxieties of his female participants by creating forms of maternal mirroring as well as through the comforting sound of his voice either through his immediate and/or symbolic presence. Gok Wan's symbolic presence through his voice became apparent in Nikki's case, where a 'walkie-talkie' device was employed by the expert himself to offer comfort, emotional encouragement and reassurance through his voice, thus relieving Nikki from her 'naked' fears during her shop window challenge.

The playful mechanisms of creativity organised and activated by Gok Wan open up 'potential space[s]' to facilitate the subjects' self-experience and provide a cultural opportunity to engage with hidden and unexplored aspects of self-experience in order to reach a new level of emotional self-awareness through the body by making sense of these troubled experiences in relation to the body in a meaningful way so they can be emotionally understood and eventually overcome. My case study analysis of the *HTLGN* method has allowed me to situate the extent of its affective significance and therapeutic potential in facilitating culturally rich opportunities for understanding self-experience in a constructive way so that hidden aspects of identity can be explored and (re)discovered.

Gok Wan's affective gestures and expression of care and comfort allow him to build a trustworthy relationship with his subjects during their overwhelming 'naked' moment of their *HTLGN* experience. Having announced that he is a homosexual man, Gok Wan has often identified himself as 'one of the girls' or used epithets such as 'Aunty Gok' or 'Fairy Gok-mother', to signify his presence as a motherly and/or female friendly figure, thus removing the threat of any sexual desire towards his subjects. Gok Wan's non-judgemental stance and empathic approach towards his subjects' body related troubles as well as his 'emotional knowingness' in comforting his female subjects became a culturally recognised and celebrated feature of his makeover approach and have been significant characteristics of his makeover method in *HTLGN*.

Gok Wan has been candid – in popular media and through his autobiography – about his former troubles with obesity and eating disorders as well as his own body-image insecurities and frustrations in the past. As a result, Gok Wan's capacity for expressions of empathy towards his subjects' body related concerns has been central to my psychoanalytic exploration of discovering what is at stake emotionally for the expert.

Actively engaging in his participants' reflective narratives, Gok Wan often recalls his former body related struggles to provide emotional relief to his subjects allowing the *HTLGN* method and in particular the 'mirror sequence' to develop into a 'intermediate space of [therapeutic] experience' for the expert himself, who, during the running of the *HTLGN* series, was reminded of his own unresolved/unconscious pain and fears.



Chapter 5 revealed that the *HTLGN* setting and the ‘mirror sequence’ process held emotional and therapeutic significance for the expert himself, since he re-visits what appears to be a symbolic replication that parallels his own earlier ‘naked’ mirror process. Signalling that Gok Wan experienced a form of an absent maternal mirroring in his former ‘naked’ encounters with an ornate mirror, it became apparent that his reflective interaction and emotional involvement in his participants’ ‘naked’ mirror narratives constituted a form of emotional restoration. This analysis revealed an important evolution in the makeover frame, where the omnipotent figure of the expert as objective judge is culturally undone.

*HTLGN*’s symbolic use of the ‘mirror’ has confirmed the efficacy of Gok Wan’s methods since it accentuates the usefulness of self-reflection as culturally therapeutic in offering opportunities of making sense of, discovering and identifying emotional troubles in relation to the body. Ten years on, the *HTLGN* experience still pervades the contemporary media landscape through the expansion of Gok Wan’s approach outside the makeover frame. The ‘therapeutic attitude’ of Gok Wan’s method has now become culturally internalised as a practice with ‘life-transforming potential’ (Richards and Brown, 2002:110), accentuating and confirming the cultural significance and therapeutic value of his *HTLGN* makeover approach.

My project on *HTLGN* has offered an original psycho-cultural insight into the positive advantages of the makeover format and signalled its therapeutic value in providing a form of ‘cultural experience’ enriched with emotional subjective

understanding that aims to facilitate emotional awareness and offer the opportunity for self-growth. Through the application of Winnicott's ideas, I have psycho-culturally demonstrated that when playful and creative opportunities are organised within a 'holding' and caring makeover context, an emotional transformation of inner subjective experience is possible.

It is easy to be dismissive about the genre of makeover television since it has been subjected to endless academic critique with little regard for its cultural value. Extending Richards' work on the notion of 'therapeutic culture' and through the extensive use of Winnicott's ideas, this project has signalled that the popular frame of makeover television can offer up opportunities of creative experience that can shape contemporary notions of identities, generate cultural awareness and be a valuable indicator of current postfeminist experience. Whilst the application of psychoanalytic theory has been largely absent from media studies, since its theoretical underpinnings were perceived with a certain 'mistrust' and thus exposed to recurrent cultural critique, my work confirms the methodological usefulness of a psychoanalytic approach and constitutes evidence for its value and cultural relevance in gaining a new understanding and insights into the unconscious workings that are at play in popular media and cultural spaces where emotions and the therapeutic dominate the setting.

As confirmed in the psycho-cultural field of media and cultural studies (Bainbridge, Radstone, Rustin & Yates, 2007; Bainbridge & Yates, 2011; 2012; 2014; Bainbridge, Ward & Yates, 2014; MacRury & Rustin, 2014), object relations psychoanalysis is, indeed, a powerful methodological tool that can reveal the

cultural values and therapeutic significance of such popular texts and their affective impact in shaping notions of identity and new understanding of emotional subjective experiences. My psycho-cultural reading of Gok Wan's makeover method contributes further to this field of enquiry. My research has confirmed the therapeutic significance of *HTLGN* and has created a new way of understanding the emotional and unconscious working of popular media texts and the ways in which we gain a deeper understanding of inner self-experience that enrich notions of the self and identity.

During my own playful and 'creative' engagement in applying Winnicott's ideas to the makeover text, I have discovered that the cultural 'voice' of *HTLGN* and that of Winnicott's psychoanalytic writings together make sense when themes and concepts of emotional self-understanding and self-growth are explored.

Drawing on Winnicott's 'voice' work, Annette Kuhn writes:

There is something pragmatic, kindly accessible about his words ... Winnicott makes sense. The situations, set-ups, feelings and relationships ... feel intuitively familiar: they chime with what we already know about ourselves, while opening up fresh insights ... [Winnicott's voice] offer[s] ... fresh ways of thinking about one's current concern – issues and questions that one is already thinking about or working on ... offer[ing] exactly the kind of discovery or answers you were unaware of seeking. (Kuhn, 2013:1-2)

It is through Winnicott's psychoanalytic work that one can gain an emotional and cultural understanding of the postfeminist opportunity that arises out of the *HTLGN* discourse for its female subjects and its viewers by extension. Gok Wan's makeover experience has offered its makeover participants the chance to make

sense of their emotional troubles through the articulation of their emotional concerns. Their transformational experience in reaching for new meaning and interpretation also impacts on the show's viewers. *HTLGN*'s 'emotional representatives' and their emotionally rich transformational process and self-reflective interaction with Gok Wan mobilises for the female spectator a cultural opportunity to negotiate hidden aspects of their feminine identity that 'might otherwise be subliminal and out of conscious awareness' (Richards and Brown, 2011:23).

*HTLGN*'s therapeutic potential lies in its invitation to negotiate aspects of self-experience and to arrive at one's own interpretation through a process of self-reflection. This insight allows us to recognise Gok Wan's makeover method as a positive exemplar of how popular culture can facilitate rich opportunities for emotional release and self-awareness. In turn, this enables us to understand that Gok Wan's makeover method mobilises rich therapeutic and postfeminist discourses, where current feminine experience can be recognised and negotiated. Most importantly, it also finds cultural expression, and this constitutes a meaningful and transformative experience in itself.

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